



Open Synod Group

Newsletter

Spring 2017

President : Right Rev Trevor Willmott, Bishop of Dover
Chair : Anne Martin, Guildford

Editor : Tim Hind, Bath & Wells

Editorial

I hope that you will enjoy this group of articles. It is encouraging when internally we are bound up with Lay Leadership and Shared Conversations to see that Brexit and Climate Change are still highlighted as concerns for us. Both topics are about the way we treat each other individually and collectively. How we abuse our planet or how we interact with other countries on trade and immigration are key to the way people view us as Christians.

Having said that, we have a very timely article on “Setting God’s People Free” from Matthew Frost which helps to set the context for developments in Lay Leadership.

Insights into individual members concerns are valuable as they ground us. The importance of using a Cathedral as part of the Missional activity of a Diocese helps us to maximise our chances of reaching out to the society around. Taking due care of the way in which we communicate internally (within Synod) and externally (within our Dioceses) is paramount. It is easy for us to get into a rut and so it is useful to be nudged to do better.

As I write this I am aware that we have recently lost (at the age of 99) one of our foremost synodsmen. Oswald Clark served in the Church Assembly and General Synod for 42 years from 1948-1990 and was Chair of the House of Laity for 6 years. A good innings! I had the privilege of being part of the congregation in Backwell when his brother, Roland, was Rector.



Chair's Reflections

Anne Martin, Chair, Open Synod Group

Thoughts on the Year Ahead

2016 proved to be a surprising and anxious year.

Many people here and around the world are starting 2017 anxiously wondering what will happen. I suspect a number of us on General Synod are looking to our next meetings with trepidation, hoping that everyone will engage with courtesy, consideration, sincerity and a willingness to listen.

I worry that, at a time when it is so important for the Church to be looking outwards, we become focused on our internal problems and issues that those outside cannot comprehend why they are a problem. To be seen arguing with acrimony among ourselves does enormous disservice to the mission of the Church.

In the discussions at General Synod last July, it was the unwillingness of some even to engage in talking and listening to establish an environment of trust from which finding a way forward could begin that I found most upsetting.

Open Synod offers a safe space for everyone across the Church of England, where we hope all will meet in a spirit of co-operation and friendship. All our members I'm sure will do all they can to foster that spirit throughout the meetings of General Synod and in their own parishes.

In the aftermath of Brexit, the Church has a role and responsibility in helping to bring people together and supporting any of whatever background who have been maltreated. In a world racked with poverty and injustice, we must look outward and serve together.

We can celebrate that the Church of England has moved forward together to reach a place where the appointment of a woman bishop is no longer news but perfectly normal. We are looking forward to hearing the Rt Rev Christine Hardman reflect on that journey, since her appointment in 2015 as Bishop of Newcastle, at our evening Supper Meeting on Tuesday February 14th and I hope to see you there.



Things to ponder inside and outside the walls of General Synod

Just a reminder that the articles here represent the views of the contributors and do not indicate endorsement by the Open Synod Group.

Dame Caroline Spelman, MP

Post Brexit Reflection

Increasingly the UK's Brexit decision can be seen in the global context of rising populism.

The populist stance appeals to those who have not fared well under the impact of globalisation. In our high-wage economies, those on low pay who have to compete with developing economies have seen their standards of living fall.

No government in the industrial world has found a comprehensive answer to this. America sought to extend free healthcare to the poorest. The UK has introduced a living wage. But people still fear that migrants are taking jobs and housing. However, migrants are often willing to do low paid jobs which others are not. Housing is not first-allocated to migrants but to those with a qualifying connection to the areas.

The Archbishop of Canterbury describes how people became disinhibited by the Referendum Campaign. People felt empowered to say things they otherwise wouldn't. Immigration became a key topic. The seductive slogan to "*take back control of our borders*" drew many to the cause of Brexit. Sovereignty was a term which cropped up in conversation without people having a true sense of why we sacrifice some sovereignty in our national interest such as being a member of NATO.

So we need to get to the root causes of the disaffection towards others and especially the institutions of Europe. Thirty years of negative headlines about Europe in the British press means there is no natural affinity with the European project. Other European countries recognise the EU as a peace-keeper but for the UK this is less of an issue.

Even on the continent there is no great love for the EU institutions and other referenda have produced close results. Blame for some of this has to be laid at the door of Europe's elite for failing to communicate the benefits which membership brings and to adapt the institutions in timely fashion to global trends, notably migration where the principle of free movement becomes almost unworkable without undermining social cohesion.

Now it has been decided by a narrow majority that the UK will leave the EU there is a huge amount of work to be done to deliver it. The negotiations are likely to be characterised by reciprocity and regulatory equivalence. The decision to transfer EU legislation into national law via the Great Repeal Bill will provide significant continuity and time to ensure the unintended consequences of discarding valuable regulations can be avoided.

So in the uncharted waters ahead cool heads are needed and the humility of understanding our true position in the world. The expectations of the public whipped up by populists are high so there is considerable pressure to deliver in record time.



David Martlew

My first year on General Synod has been a steep learning curve. Overall, I'm finding the experience stimulating and interesting.

Many of the members I have encountered engender respect, for their commitment, knowledge, and ability to articulate their views. Debate which is impassioned at times but generally good-humoured is a welcome discovery.

The trouble is that this first year's experience has led me to feel quite strongly about a number of issues, but I have yet to learn the ropes sufficiently to contribute effectively in the Chamber. How do you curb a tendency to gallop away in all directions at once?

I'm impressed by the smooth running of Sessions - clearly in the background the staff are working hard and effectively - they deserve a medal!

However I find myself somewhat critical of the way in which documentation is framed. Occupationally I come from an applied science background, rooted in industry, so I'd value documents with fewer words, stronger structure and prioritised points.

My first speech in the chamber in February was a cock-up (sic) because I was betrayed by the faulty Synod App - the call to speak came out of the blue, leaving me with just a couple of minutes to prepare what I wished to say.

I'm impressed by Sandra Millar's project on baptisms, weddings and funerals, but it's not clear how to get those key messages out into the local parish churches in a way which will effect behaviour change. Her excellent work needs to be supported strongly.

I organised a Fringe Meeting in July on the use of internet and digital resources in outreach and evangelism at local church level - it was entitled "Colonising the Digital Landscape". The Church of England centrally has made prodigious strides forward in terms of high budget central utilisation of digital resources. As we move towards Digital Evangelism it is urgent that we encourage low budget engagement at local parish church level. We need this by yesterday at the latest!

Communication is key. Within Synod we need to talk effectively to one another to build bridges and remove barriers. Please could we have the GS Address Lists in machine- readable form, rather than as ink and dead trees?

I am still wet behind the ears in terms of General Synod - I have a lot to learn. But I remain convinced that we must develop the skill to collaborate in mutual respect, in the service of Christ.



Canon Anna Norman–Walker, Canon Chancellor & Missioner Exeter

Cathedrals are such a ‘good news’ story for the Church of England and it is a real privilege to be given the opportunity to devote my time to nurturing discipleship and mission at Exeter Cathedral in recent years. Thank you ‘Open Synod’ for asking me to share my story with you.

In October 2010 I took up a new post at the Diocesan Missioner in Exeter Diocese and was installed as part time Canon Missioner at Exeter Cathedral. My brief around the Diocese was very much about helping churches to think about Mission and to develop new forms of collaboration across parish boundaries within what we call ‘Mission Communities’ in Devon. I can facilitate ‘Mission Actions Planning’ in my sleep as a result! My work then was predominantly in the parishes but I was asked to develop the work at the Cathedral in two specific areas.

The first was to explore what creative opportunities there were to extend our worship offer in the city beyond the staple of Choral services which characterise Cathedrals, as a means to reaching people for whom this is not a natural fit. I was also asked to explore the way in which we could collaborate with the cities churches around supporting the homeless and vulnerably housed in the city.

In Oct 2011 after a period of listening and consultation we planted a new monthly congregation called ‘Holy Ground’. Creative contemplative worship followed by refreshments and then a speaker with Q&A is broadly speaking the character of Holy Ground and it has been exciting to watch Holy Ground grow and flourish over the past 5 years. From a handful of people to an average attendance of 120 and the growth of a wonderful team, three of which have left us for ordination training.

In terms of our work with the cities homeless we opened a drop-in café once a week, where we simply provide a hot meal and drinks and an opportunity for some conversation and friendship. Most weeks we serve around 50 meals and it has been wonderful to see the way in which the wider Cathedral community has embraced this work with the offering of volunteer help, funding and an endless supply of sleeping bags and warm clothing.

In 2014 one of our full time residentiary Canons moved on and the Dean and Chapter invited me to take up the full time post of Chancellor at the Cathedral and I was delighted to accept. My brief now extends to helping the Cathedral develop its ‘learning for discipleship’ programme and to enable the monthly evening worship offer to extend to weekly. A year ago Sunday@7 began on the Sunday evenings between Holy Grounds and we have a steadily growing congregation of 50 or so people and recently bought 5 to confirmation.



Giles Goddard

Climate Change and Synod

As I write this, the evidence is growing that 2016 will be the hottest year on record, warmer than 2015 or 2014 which were in their turn the warmest on record. Environmental degradation is a reality around the world, and the current political situation does not bode well for the future.

In February 2014 General Synod passed a motion encouraging the Church of England to be more active on climate change and the environment. Since then, a great deal has happened. Here are some of the highlights.

- The Ethical Investment Advisory Group (EIAG) published a ground-breaking report on investment and fossil fuels.
- The Church Commissioners have sold their investments in thermal coal and tar sands and supported innovative motions to Shell, BP and Exxon's AGM's about carbon disclosure.
- A new C of E Environment Working Party has been set up, chaired by the Bishop of Salisbury and reporting to Archbishops' Council.
- EcoChurch was launched with the strong support of the Church of England and already has good take-up across the country.
- We supported the Pilgrimage to Paris and were very present at the climate change talks in Paris in November 2015
- The Diocesan Environment Officer network is becoming stronger and stronger, and the Shrinking the Footprint team is working closely with the Environment Group.
- Two very well attended conferences on churchyard trees were held in September 2016

It's a good story which will be further strengthened by the launch of the Transition Pathway Initiative – EIAG's new approach to monitoring and engaging with the companies in which we invest. There are also several Diocesan motions working through the system to be debated by General Synod in due course.



Matthew Frost, Chair, Lay Leadership Task Group for the Archbishops' Council

Setting God's People Free - How to live an abundant life

A key element of the Archbishops' initiative for the renewal and reform of the Church will come to General Synod in February.

The question at its heart is how will we empower the 98% of the Church of England who are not ordained and set them free for fruitful, faithful mission and ministry and a vibrant relationship with Jesus in all of life, Monday to Saturday as well as Sunday?

It has been a privilege to chair the Task Group on Lay Leadership and work with a fellow band of committed Christians on this critical issue.

Our report, *Setting God's People Free*, concludes that what needs to be addressed is not a particular theological or ecclesiastical issue but the Church's overall culture. This is a culture that over-emphasises the distinction between sacred and secular and therefore fails to communicate the all-encompassing scope of the Gospel in every sphere and walk of life.

We highlight two shifts in culture and practice that we see as critical to the empowerment of the laity, the flourishing of the Church and the evangelisation of the nation.

First. Until, together, ordained and lay, we form and equip lay people to follow Jesus confidently in every sphere of life in ways that demonstrate the Gospel we will never set God's people free to evangelise the nation.

Second. Until laity and clergy are convinced, based on their baptismal mutuality, that they are equal in worth and status, complementary in gifting and vocation, mutually accountable in discipleship, and equal partners in mission, we will never form Christian communities that can evangelise the nation.

We see the report as marking the start of a vital journey – where we frame the opportunity ahead of us, review the 'lay of the land', and propose a series of next steps that we might take together. In doing so there are a few points we need to emphasise about this report.

- It looks beyond and outside Church structures to the whole people of God at work in communities and wider society – not to 'fixing' the institutional Church.
- It seeks to affirm and enable the complementary roles and vocations of clergy and of lay people, grounded in our common baptism – not to blur or undermine these distinctions.
- It proposes steps to nourish, illuminate and connect what is working already in and through frontline parishes – not to institute a top down, centrally driven approach.
- It aims to see confident involvement, engagement and leadership of lay people wherever they are called to serve – not to devise lay alternatives to clergy.

In my own life and work I have been fortunate to be surrounded with Godly people who have helped me both to pursue a 'whole-of-life' vision for mission and discipleship, and to embrace my baptism and vocation within the 'royal priesthood of all believers'. Whilst I often stumble, these perspectives encourage and inspire me daily to ask how the Gospel and scripture are relevant to every sphere of life, and how God might work through me, today, to help bring about the transformation of society and the 'making of all things new'.



Don't forget

All members of General Synod are cordially invited to

Supper Meeting

including a talk by The Bishop of Newcastle,

The Rt Rev. Christine Hardman

on her journey to becoming a bishop

Tuesday February 14th at 7.15 p.m.

Robert Runcie Room, Church House



You should already have seen the flyer and maybe you have responded. However, in case you haven't you can still come so long as you notify our Chairman, Anne Martin (anne@amartin.org.uk), by Tuesday, January 31st including your Surname and Synod number and any dietary requirements if you would like to attend. The cost will be £20 including a hot meal and glass of wine.

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