



Open Synod Group

Newsletter

Spring 2018

President : Right Rev Trevor Willmott, Bishop of Dover
Acting Chair : Robin Back, Norwich

Editor : Tim Hind, Bath & Wells

Editorial

A belated Happy New Year to one and all. In this edition I have tried to gather a few insights into some of the things that helps our church to function as well as to show some of the impact that we have in the world. I am grateful to those who have provided articles. Fewer articles this time around but all vital in an attempt to show that the church is here and able to work efficiently to make a difference.

It is clear that for many the work of the Legislative Committee and the Church Buildings Council are arcane. Peter Bruinvels and Sir Tony Baldry work tirelessly to help make these vital organs operate successfully. I found their expositions very helpful. I am really pleased to have been able to secure an update from the Bishop of Huddersfield on "Presence & Engagement following the debate in July. This is central to how our church contributes to the common good. More information can be found [here](#).

I want to echo what the Bishop of Dover says in his President's Reflections by restating how important it is for the Open Synod Group that it ensures that it has at its core that word "Open". To be a space where all voices can be heard whether we agree with them or not. If you have a topic, controversial or not, that you wish to air then let me know.

A reminder that the views expressed in this newsletter are those of the author and are not necessarily endorsed by the Open Synod Group.



President's Reflections

The Rt Revd Trevor Willmott, President, Open Synod Group

For many of us the New Year offers an opportunity to do some “clearing out”. One of the great traditions in Naples, where I was once Chaplain, before everyone started parking cars below their apartments was literally to throw out the old (onto the street below) in order to welcome the new...If nothing else it kept the refuse collectors in business!

One of the things I would most like to throw out of our public life are the ways in which much of our public discourse has become increasingly brutal. Moderation, one of the Greek virtues, is now all too often seen as a sign of weakness or lack of conviction. Afraid of being seen as a “loser” we become combative in our approach to those with whom we profoundly disagree.



OSG was founded to be a community, a safe environment, in which we could listen carefully to those with whom we might disagree profoundly. To quote David Ison, the Dean of St Paul's, “where we might find something of Christ in each other”; A meeting place in which no one would feel belittled, walked over or pushed out.

If we are to be living signs of that Kingdom for which we pray we, too, need to be aware of how the world sees us when our language becomes brutal and combative in our dealings with each other and in the course of our synodical life.

“Peace on Earth, Goodwill to All” isn't just a cosy slogan for Christmas but surely the heart of what it means for us to be the discipleship community of Jesus Christ.

Finally I know I speak on behalf of everyone in OSG in thanking Anne for the wisdom and encouragement which marked her time as our Chair. The challenge now for all of us is to build on her leadership and to continue to be that “moderating” voice in the common councils of our Church.

With my prayers and blessing

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read “+ Trevor” with a flourish underneath.

Presence and Engagement - An Update

The Rt Revd Dr Jonathan Gibbs - Bishop of Huddersfield

I am delighted to have the chance to give this update, with information provided by Kat Brealey, who is the Presence and Engagement National Programme Coordinator in Mission and Public Affairs.

Building on the Synod report (GS 2063), P&E has now agreed a strategy for the next phase of its work, which includes four goals, related to the four areas outlined in the report:

- The Church of England thrives in P&E contexts.
- Clergy and lay people want to live and work in P&E contexts, and are fulfilled in doing so.
- Christians engage with people of other faiths for the common good.
- Christian faith is shared confidently and sensitively.



Kat reports:

“We’ve identified strategies to address each of these, and practical starting points for doing so. Clearly we can’t work on everything simultaneously, and so far we’ve been thinking about the first and second goal. For the first one, we want to develop an understanding of what it means for the church to thrive in religiously diverse areas. What are the indicators of this? How do we measure it? We know that the stats traditionally collected may not capture the huge range of activities which involve people of different faiths and the relationships these develop. So we’re planning to carry out some research into what creative things local churches are doing in diverse areas, talking to leaders to see what lessons they’ve learned and then sharing these more widely.

“Secondly, parishes are struggling to recruit and this is something which needs to be addressed at multiple levels. So we are keen to ensure better support for existing P&E clergy via their diocesan interfaith adviser. We are also looking to create a network of ordinands with an interest in ministry in multi-faith areas so that they can be supported through their training and hopefully into P&E parishes. Thirdly, we are keen to explore whether we can be more intentional about promoting P&E ministry as a vocation.”

Based on my own experience, I would endorse everything that Kat has said. Some of the most exciting and creative ministry in my Area is happening in P&E contexts, for instance in Batley following the murder of Jo Cox MP. There the clergy and churches have been at the forefront of community engagement and the profile and credibility of the Church have been greatly enhanced – alongside working with Jo’s sister Kim Leadbeater on the “More in Common” initiative.

At the same time, what saddens me is the difficulty of recruiting clergy in these contexts. There are many challenges in these areas, but there are also great opportunities to put the church back at the heart of our communities and to play a leading role in transforming the life of our nation. If you want to know more, Kat or I would be delighted to hear from you!

The Future of Church Buildings

Rt. Hon. Canon Sir Tony Baldry - Chair, Church Buildings Council.

Two years ago, General Synod agreed to the setting up of a Church Buildings Commission. This was one of a number of recommendations of a Committee chaired by the Bishop of Worcester, which had already received the endorsement and support of both the Archbishops Council and the Church Commissioners.

The proposed Church Buildings Commission would take over the existing responsibilities of both the Church Buildings Council and that part of the Church Commissioners which deals with closing or closed churches. However, because of a total unpreparedness of the Church Commissioners to engage, in practice nothing has happened since General Synod of February 2016 on this proposal.

The Church of England is responsible for some 16,000 church buildings across the country. A large number of these are listed, or put another way, a very large proportion of Grade One Listed Buildings in this country are churches. The majority of church buildings are in rural areas where there is a minority of the nation's population. They are an important part of our nation's heritage but the costs of maintenance and repair are significant – and there are many in the Church of England who from their own perspective feel that these sorts of sums of money might be better spent on other mission and work.

As the Report published by DCMS, chaired by Bernard Taylor, has shown, the Treasury, Government and the Heritage Lobby are all equivocal as to who should meet the costs of repairing and maintaining church buildings. The Church Buildings Council (CBC) together with Diocesan Advisory Committees (DACs) and Diocesan Chancellors collectively provide a pretty good service at advising PCCs and others concerned on the practicalities and any policies relating to repairs or reordering of churches, including trying to ensure that wherever possible churches can be adapted for new forms of worship and where appropriate reordered to provide the widest possible community use and access.

The CBC, its officers, members and specialist committees, have an unrivalled range of expertise on any matter that might be relevant to a church building. However, we have to recognise that there are going to be some increasingly difficult policy decisions that are going to need to be made by Dioceses, by PCCs, and by the new Benefice structures when they come into being, and the CBC is not set up, structured or resourced to give proper advice or help on policy.

So the Church of England has a choice. We either continue to busk along as we are, or we do what everyone agreed two years ago should be done which is to establish a Statutory Body which has the resources and competence to engage and advise on policy issues towards church buildings and then can seek to ensure that the Church of England still has a presence in every community, tries to square the circle of church buildings being benefits and not burdens, and is able to engage with Government and society as to how the burden and responsibility of maintaining our built national heritage should be fairly shared.



Getting Legal Things Done The Parliamentary Way

Canon Peter Bruinvels - Vice Chair, Legislative Committee

I was elected to the General Synod Legislative Committee in 1985, whilst I was still a Member of Parliament (Leicester East).

Being a Member appealed to me straight away, not just because I was legally trained, but more importantly because all General Synod Measures came through Parliament for Final Approval and I had always been interested in the Church of England and the legislative process, speaking in virtually every debate.

The Legislative Committee was established in 1919 and is required by law (the Church of England Assembly (Powers) Act 1919) and is included in the Constitution of the General Synod. It has a number of very important tasks to undertake – such as tidying up legislation and making legislation easier to understand with helpful footnotes and detailed explanations. But its main purpose is to submit all Measures to Parliament for approval, once they have received Final Approval by the General Synod. Not surprising as the Church of England is an established Church! Measures passed in Synod have normally taken quite a circuitous route from the beginning, having started life under First Consideration; then moved on to the Revision Committee with the active involvement of the Steering Committee where the Legislation (Measure or Amending Canon) is reviewed in full. It then returns to General Synod as draft legislation (Draft Measure or Amending Canon) to be subject to Final Drafting and Approval.

Once the motion for Final Approval is passed, Measures stand automatically committed to the Legislative Committee which discusses their presentation to Parliament and timing as we work closely within the “usual channels” (Whips Offices). We also have to approve the Comments and Explanations for submission to the Ecclesiastical Committee. This is crucial work as Members of the Ecclesiastical Committee ask many informed questions, especially on voting figures and churchmanship. Their local knowledge is quite amazing and it is definitely not always an “easy ride”. (However, we do try and predict the line of questioning!)

Debates on General Synod Measures take place in Parliament usually after them going before Parliament’s Ecclesiastical Committee, which is made up of both Peers and MPs in equal number (15 each) nominated by the Lord Chancellor and the Speaker respectively. I was one of the Members there as well.

The Legislative Committee consists of a large number of Church VIP Ex-Officio Members – The Archbishop of Canterbury (Joint Chair), The Archbishop of York (Joint Chair), The Prolocutors of both Convocations, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the House of Laity, the Dean of the Arches, the Second Estates Commissioner. The Elected Members consist of one Bishop, three Laity including myself as the Deputy Chair and two Clergy. Our Secretary is the Church of England’s Legal Adviser with the Secretary General in attendance along with Standing Counsel.

In all my time on the Committee, only once or twice can I recall either Archbishop chairing, even when we debated in our Committee – the Consecration and Ordination of Women Bishops Measure prior to it going to a specially convened Ecclesiastical Committee in the House of Lords. I



was privileged to chair it on the authority of Archbishop Justin and then to agree the Explanation and Notes through the night in York, which were then jointly signed by Archbishop Justin and myself.

At that meeting, as we do at each meeting – we needed to decide who would give evidence to the Ecclesiastical Committee. That was not difficult that day as our agreed witnesses were Archbishop Justin and Christine Hardman – then Archdeacon and now Bishop of Newcastle. I was present as Chair of the Legislative Committee and co-author / signatory of the Report to be available as a witness. The whole Committee were present and it was broadcast live on the BBC Parliament Programme. The Ecclesiastical Committee as required under the 1919 Act reported on “the nature and legal effect of the measure of the measure and its views as to the expediency thereof, especially with relation to the constitutional rights of all His / Her Majesty’s subjects.” The Committee report was first communicated in draft to our Committee, who do not have the power to amend any Measure. They found the Measure expedient! (In other words, they voted in favour of it)

I well recall the then Chairman of the Ecclesiastical Committee, Lord Lloyd - praising us and our Officers for the very well put together background papers and as witnesses. It was a momentous day with a specially convened meeting Ecclesiastical Committee. From the line of questioning, it was clear that MPs and Peers wanted the Measure to be passed as quickly as possible. And the rest is history!

Motions to present this Measure for Royal Assent were then debated in each House as soon after the Ecclesiastical Committee report was laid with the Second Church Estates Commissioner moving it in the House of Commons.

All of us as Committee Members felt very proud and that it was a job well done and a great privilege to be part of history in the making.

General Synod and Parliament still do have many things in common as concerns legislation and the making of laws. We can and do learn from each other. All such votes in Parliament are free votes with no whipping to help ensure that common sense will prevail. It is a unique partnership of trust and respect for each of our hallowed institutions and it works!

Don't forget

OSG Supper & Meeting



Thursday 8th February 2018 @ 6:00 p.m.

Robert Runcie Room in Church House

Thurs. Feb. 8th

Dinner at 6pm following Evening Worship

Meeting at 7 pm

"No Lusher Way" Speaker

Father Thomas Seville

Fr Thomas introduces what it is to live as a monk, what it offers the contemporary life of the church and the world. With a new spice or two to the Church of England's vocations menu, he puts it in the context of wider questions of belief and discipleship.

Don't forget

THE AGM



Saturday 10th February 2018 @ 8:30 a.m.

Westminster Room Church House

Agenda

1. Apologies for absence
2. Minutes of the AGM February 2017
3. Matters arising
4. OSG Constitution Update
5. Treasurer's report
6. Subscriptions
7. Membership & Recruitment
8. Quiz and future meetings
9. Website
10. Newsletter
11. A.O.B.

Synod Contacts

OSG Officers & Committee Members

Vacancy - (Chair)

Robin Back, Norwich - (Acting Chair, Membership Secretary & Webmaster)

Mrs Penny Allen, Lichfield - (Vice Chair & Minute Secretary)

Mr John Freeman, Chester - (Treasurer)

Simon Talbot, Ely - (Committee Member)

Janet Perrett, Ely - (Committee Member)

Tim Hind, Bath & Wells - (Newsletter Editor)

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