



# Open Synod Group

## Newsletter

## Summer 2016

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

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*Editor : Tim Hind, Bath & Wells*

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### Editorial

It is lovely to have the opportunity to edit this summer newsletter. Anne Martin, our Chair, has outlined her view of the new synod and reminded us all of the importance of the chance to engage socially as well as in debate. The Quiz on Saturday night in York is always a great moment in the life of Synod and John Freeman, our Treasurer, gives us a timely update of the good work done as a result of your kind donations following the Revue last July.

For this edition I invited a variety of members to give us insights into their hopes and fears for the next five years. Unsurprisingly, there is a commonality in many of their musings and we will need to ensure that the “elephants in the room” are clearly identified and managed well - not in a spirit of wanting to suppress debate but to ensure that we can all be able to better understand what needs to be done.

It is important to note that none of the opinions shown are necessarily endorsed by the Open Synod Group. So long as they are not libellous or in any way offensive, it is vital that we allow articles to express views openly and with integrity.

I hope to be able to invite other articles from members of synod and elsewhere for our next newsletter which will be issued shortly before the February 2017 Synod. If you would like to be proactive and write an article (guideline 300 words) then I would welcome that. I am, naturally, expecting Renewal & Reform and Shared Conversations to be exercising most people’s minds over the next few months but please surprise me!



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## Chair's Reflections

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### *Anne Martin, Chair, Open Synod Group*

Much has changed with the new Quinquennium; in particular the large changeover in membership and the arrival of woman bishops. Familiar faces have gone; recognition, new alliances, friendship and trust are to be built. I welcome the new beginning and new membership but also hope that the atmosphere of trust and co-operation that had developed by the end of the last Synod is maintained into the new body.

Facilitated conversations were significant in the last Quinquennium; at the end goodwill and a willingness to listen and co-operation had established a positive working relationship across the churchmanship in General Synod; it felt we were really working together for the good of the Church of England. This positive, and dare I say Christian, atmosphere was in complete contrast to the atmosphere that prevailed in the first years of the life of the last Synod. Those of us at the close in July 2015 will never forget the sight of Christina Rees and David Houlding walking across the floor to hug each other – unthinkable four and a half years before.

Over the next four years we will have difficult tasks before us, not least the future of the Church of England and the Human Sexuality issue. General Synod must find common ground to work constructively together for the good of Christianity and the Church of England, the former being the most important. We will not always agree but we must learn to align Christian belief and tradition with the world we live in, never using our faith to discriminate against others and finding solutions without compromising our faith. If we don't, we won't survive. It is a message that we need to promote outside General Synod as well as among ourselves.

Open Synod has always tried to provide an open, welcoming space, where all who are willing to listen, discuss and join in Christian Fellowship are welcome. We belong to a broad church and we want to celebrate what we have in common, not that which divides us, and use that to find a way forward for the future.

We hope as many people as possible will join us for the traditional OSG Quiz on Saturday after the evening session in York, a chance to enjoy a glass of wine and share common fellowship with others, whatever their churchmanship, and raise money for charity -at the Synod Revue organised by OSG in 2015, we managed to raise £1800. You are welcome as part of a team or find others to join when you arrive. It's a chance to let your hair down! Edmund Marshall, previously a GS member, is returning to York specially to be our Quizmaster.

I look forward to seeing you in York, and hope and pray that we can create a working atmosphere in this Synod that continues from where we reached in July 2015.



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## Hopes & Fears for 2015-2020

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### *Jamie Harrison, Chair, House of Laity*

I am delighted to offer some thoughts on the current Synod. Many of us are new, not least in the House of Bishops, which has seen many changes in the last 2-3 years. It took me a year or three to get the hang of standing orders, and other necessary, but strange, synodical ways. Please be kind to the Chairs, whose task is to keep us in order. What is striking since 2012 is the change of mood, based on mutual acceptance and an emerging trust. Trust follows trustworthiness, and we have much to thank the leadership of the previous Synod for their example in this area.

Listening is not easy; as a GP I found it possible to nod but still be distracted. Good listening will lead to new questions as well as new understandings, to challenge as much as to agree, because proper engagement takes the other person seriously. Those who have been on Synod longer bring the corporate memory that every organisation needs. Equally, those new to Synod have yet to go 'native', and contribute a freshness to our debates. It was good to hear a series of maiden speeches in February.

So what about hopes and fears? Synod is often at its best when outward looking, considering issues of the wider world, needs beyond the church. So I hope for informed debates concerning issues of: the beginning and end of life, justice in its many forms, health, those on the margins, and what it means to live alongside those of other faiths and none. Fears would be about too much inward looking, with the risks of polarisation, or seeking simplistic solutions. It is important that we do theology together, creating relationship and rejecting tribalism.

Laity will take a keen interest in Renewal and Reform themes of (what I term) 'discipleship for all, lay ecclesial ministry for some, and lay leadership for many'. But I would also encourage laity to take part in debates that concern others – the nature of clergy training and terms of service, pensions, fees, and budget votes. In this way we take seriously what it means to be brothers and sisters in Christ.

Sitting on the platform in London with Cherry, Liz, and Simon was a real privilege. And the reason we kept moving places is because the seat nearest to the Chair has to be vacated for an electronic vote!



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### *Jayne Ozanne*

I can't believe it's over 10 years since I stepped down from Archbishops' Council. So much has changed; so little has changed. It is all so different and yet so strangely familiar.

I suppose the greatest change is that within myself. I've "crossed the floor", quite literally, and found myself at home in places I would never have ventured before, whilst feeling somewhat out of sorts with those to whom I would have normally gravitated.

The reason as most will be aware is because of the one issue that seeks to dominate, overtly or covertly, all our debates – Sexuality.



The truth is though that I'm just the same person as I was before. I'm still as passionate as ever about my faith, and keen to speak about the "elephants in the room". It strikes me that Synod is also more willing to do this too now. Thankfully there appears to be a growing number of members who are willing to challenge perceived wisdom and hold the central structures to account. The key question is whether this means that trust in the centre is eroding, or whether it is more that people feel able to say what they really think?

My hope is that it is the latter, my fear is that it is the former. One thing in my mind is certain - Synod will always be seen as a political machine for those who have stood to protect their tribal interests. My hope is that this particular Synod will rise above that and be a place where perceived truth is spoken with authentic love. We are after all a microcosm of the Body of Christ, where we seek to embrace the rich diversity that exists amongst us all.

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### *Ian Paul*

I have a confession. I spent five years on General Synod from 2000 to 2005, and when I looked back on my time, I could not decide whether this had been a valuable investment in the service of the wider Church—or whether it had been a complete waste of time.

One reason for my ambivalence is positive. Many—perhaps most—of the important ideas, initiatives and energy for the ministry of the Church comes from parishes, congregations and local church leaders—and this is how it should be. Anyone who thinks meetings of Synod are the things which will save the Church of England needs to get out more! But the other reason has to do with how and where decisions are actually made. When I reviewed the motions on which I had spoken, influenced a vote or carried an amendment, I found that each one had either been overturned or not implemented.

Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that the first of my hopes for this Synod are that we will work with greater transparency, openness and accountability. There needs to be a step change in the way we work as a Church in many areas, which is why the Renewal and Reform programme is essential. But I hope that it will be implemented, without being derailed or hijacked, but with proper accountability.

I am very conscious that each of the interest groups in this Synod appears to have strengthened. This could be a worrying sign that the 'centre ground' is disappearing. But it could be an opportunity for honest engagement between different groups and a fruitful, respectful sharing of different views.

I earnestly hope that sexuality will not dominate our agenda for the five years. Having thought about these issues, written and spoken about them many times and been involved in endless discussions, I still cannot see a way forward that will satisfy all the different perspectives in the Church. If we let that become an obstacle to progressing other issues, we are doomed.

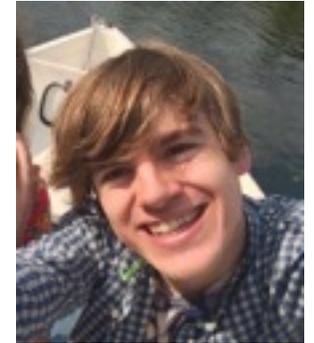
Above all I hope that this Synod recognises what God is doing in the Church, affirms the positive things happening in parishes across the country, and has the courage to remove obstacles that would prevent us fully supporting effective ministry for the kingdom of God.



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**Elliot Swatridge, CEYC (<http://www.ceyc.org>)**

Being at Synod as part of the Church of England Youth Council is a wonderful privilege, and genuinely one of the most empowering experiences of my life so far. Unlike some narratives suggest, the members are eminently welcoming to the alien species (“youth”) which we are, and truly want to connect and engage with us. There is an almost unanimously positive attitude to our presence, and desire to hear young voices – yet no-one seems quite sure how this should happen in practice. I am hoping growing understanding and empowering change, change which the whole Church is desperate for, is something we can enable young people to play an active role in.



To name the “elephant in the room”, the major issue for this quinquennium is going to be the issue of human sexuality, something which almost everyone has a strong opinion on. Christian groups have an unfortunate tendency in this area to rush to sudden conclusions and knee-jerk reactions that achieve little except to further alienate the Church from wider society. It is an issue which could literally divide the Church of England down the middle, if it is not handled with the utmost care.

Of course, no-one wants division – it would achieve nothing but years of painful argument and a terrible witness to wider society. I thus suggest that unity and fellowship, to show one another the genuine love “which binds everything together in perfect harmony”, is of greater priority than perfect agreement. Let us deal with mutual understanding, forgiveness and personal reconciliation first, and then, somehow, disagreement begins to become less heated and more manageable. It can even be constructive and good - a ‘good disagreement’.

Over 900,000 people attend Church of England services each week, of so many different cultural, theological and liturgical perspectives, sometimes the polar opposite of our own. Yet there is one table of Christ at which we all are invited to sit and eat. Imagine what we could achieve with these people, who are none other than our brothers and sisters in Christ, if only we could accept that disagreement, ‘good disagreement’, need not imply division. Imagine how bright the church would shine into a world that needs God’s healing light. In the words of our Lord, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

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**Anthony Archer**

General Synod can be so absorbing that members stand for re-election without thinking, especially the laity! As one of the longer serving members, I can at least now point to a recent sabbatical! I decided not to stand in 2010, having served for 17 years. I felt called to train for Reader ministry and do more in the diocese. Having first joined just after the women priests’ debate in 1992 and frustrated at the progress on women bishops, it seemed a good time for a break. But I missed it. I missed the people more than the issues. And I was energised by the changing of the guard at Lambeth Palace. So I am back!



The first difference was the sheer change in the composition. 53% of the elected members were not members of the last synod. But the biggest change was the presence of women in the House of Bishops. It all seemed so normal, and of course refreshing!

The second difference was the presenting issues. Renewal and Reform is now the underlying and most pressing

challenge. We need a substantial increase in the number and quality of ministerial leaders, ordained and lay. Few dioceses have addressed this. It is not just about more clergy, vital though they are. Discipleship and collaborative ministry need to be a priority. The role, equipping and empowering of the laity have been ignored for too long.

The issue of same sex marriage is more vexed yet arguably as important in missional terms. Is it about biblical interpretation, a general challenge to the Church's traditional teaching, something cultural, or a combination of all three? I am keen to facilitate the debate within the evangelical community. Much is uncertain, but one thing that is not is that the status quo is not an option. I am optimistic about the Shared Conversations, but good listening, disagreeing well and being alive to the Spirit are all crucial ingredients going forward.

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### ***Mark Russell***

It is great to be back as a member of General Synod! I previously served from 2003-2011 when I was an appointed member of the Archbishops' Council and now I am an elected member for the great Diocese of Sheffield.

When I arrived back in November and looked around the chamber a number of things struck me as very different. The first and most obvious was that there were women in purple shirts! My previous term on Synod had been dominated by the endless debates on women bishops. We had the Guildford Report, the Rochester Report, the Manchester Report, and I began to wonder if we would have to go through reports from every Diocesan See before we could see women rightfully equal as bishops. So I rejoice in the amazing progress we have made. The other notable change is the absence of some people who were huge figures of influence in my last period on Synod, people like Christina Baxter, Philip Giddings, David Houlding and Christina Rees to name a few.

There are a lot of new faces on Synod and as we look forward to the next five years we have huge challenges facing us. I serve on the Archbishops Task Group for evangelism and I hope this Synod will grasp the initiative to help us be creative and bold, to reach more people with God's love. The Renewal and Reform agenda will help us reshape our national church of the challenges of a new era. However I suspect this quinquennium will be dominated by the questions around human sexuality in the same way as the last synod was dominated by women bishops. I pray we can approach these debates recognising they are not abstract subjects but LGBT people are our neighbours, our friends and our families. As we discuss these issues we are walking on the holy ground of other people's lives, and we want them to know the Good News of God's love.

It is good to be back!



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## Treasurer's Update

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### *John Freeman, Treasurer, Open Synod Group*

Following the collection at last Year's York Synod Revue, a total of £2,300 was sent out to Vanuatu for help following Cyclone Pam in March 2015.

One of the Bishops from Vanuatu, Pattenon Worek, visited the UK in January of this year. He was able to report that Vanuatu had recovered from the effects of the cyclone helped with donations from many sources. The relief activities had to a large extent been led by the churches in Vanuatu. He instanced one distribution of relief to a meeting arranged by the Church of Melanesia. The local church leader was distributing rice, water tanks and plastic piping. He first called a representative of the Roman Catholic Church forward for their share followed by a representative from the Seventh Day Adventist Church and finally the local Anglicans. There was a member of the government present who was turned on by one of the recipients who said "Look what the Church are doing for us when you the Government have done very little".

Bishop Nigel Stock quoted Archbishop Justin Welby in the Melanesian News: "Our particular call is to respond in love to our sisters and brothers in the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, and in particular in times of stress, I am constantly inspired by the faith and courage of Christians in the Church of Melanesia, and hope that we can respond as well as we can."



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**Don't forget**

# **THE QUIZ**



**All members of General Synod are cordially invited  
Saturday evening July 9<sup>th</sup>**

**in**

**P/T 005A in the Exhibition Centre from 10.00pm after the evening session of Synod**

**Quizmaster : Edmund Marshall**

**(Questions for all ages!)**

**Teams of 4 or more**

**or come on your own and join a team**

**See you there!**

**Our Quiz sessions in previous York synods have proved a pleasant antidote to the heavy agendas and a chance to socialise over a glass of wine.**

**Donations (after expenses) to be split between Médecins sans Frontières Syria & work with refugees in Europe**

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## Open Synod Contacts

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### *OSG Officers & Committee Members*

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Mrs Anne Martin, Guildford - ( Chair)

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

Mr John Freeman, Chester - (Treasurer)

Robin Back, Norwich - (Membership Secretary & Webmaster)

Simon Talbot, Ely - (Committee Member)

Janet Perrett, Ely - (Committee Member)

Tim Hind, Bath & Wells - (Newsletter Editor)

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### *OSG NEWSLETTER EDITOR Tim Hind*

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