



Open Synod Group

Newsletter

Summer 2017

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

Editor : Tim Hind, Bath & Wells

Editorial

Writing this in the aftermath of the events on London Bridge on 3rd June (and just ahead of the General Election on 8th June) puts much of what we do into perspective. I am grateful to our varied contributors to this newsletter. I wanted to get a view of Synod from the margins and perspectives on activities outside Synod as well as differing views on the “Big Issue”.

We are tremendously privileged to have representatives from Deaf Anglicans Together and our Ecumenical Representatives with us in Synod. Clearly their outlook on our proceedings are unique in ways that many members will not instantly recognise. I believe that their offerings will help us to “see ourselves as others see us”!

Last time I asked Caroline Spelman, MP, for her view post Brexit. I am pleased to be able to offer Robert Innes’ insight into that situation. By the time you are reading this we will have a new parliament and by the time we meet in July Brexit negotiations will have started. We live in interesting times!

I, personally, wanted to learn more about the Bishop of Gloucester’s campaign on body image and welcome her article. It is good to see activity for the common good in action being episcopally led without the need for synodical governance!



That debate in February led to disappointment for many. Some felt that their hopes have been dashed by the fact that we didn't take note of the Bishops' Report. Others felt that their hopes were not realised through the report and yet felt no sense that not taking note was necessarily going to move us in a different direction quickly enough. Our two contributors reflect these aspects in part.

So I offer you this eclectic mix of views to challenge and, hopefully, to inform. Just a reminder that the articles here represent the views of the contributors and do not indicate endorsement by the Open Synod Group.

When we meet in July, the Open Synod Group will be looking for a new Chair. I am sure that you will join me in thanking Anne for all her hard work in maintaining and enhancing the life of the Group. Her steady hand has been a great asset and we will surely miss that. Having said that I am confident that we have other hands that are steady and will be able to elect a new Chair from the immense talent on offer.

Chair's Reflections

Anne Martin, Chair, Open Synod Group

As this will be my last comment as Chair, I thought for a little while about what I wanted to say. I have been proud to be a member and privileged to be the Chair, even if only for a short time. I will be resigning from General Synod at the end of the summer as we are moving to Scotland and am looking forward to the excitement and challenge of adopted grandchildren.

I hope Open Synod stands for what is good in the Church of England. A safe open and inclusive space where all members of the Church of England can meet in a spirit of co-operation and friendship, whether at a thoughtful talk at the London Synod or join in the fun at the social occasion of the summer Quiz. We are the only group who specifically organise a social event at York with the added slightly more serious aim of raising money for charity. I believe we as a group do contribute to bringing members of Synod together.

After the last General Synod in London and the vote not accepting the Bishops' Report on Human Sexuality, I pray that a real sense of urgency and a willingness to find a way forward has been ignited. Certainly calling all Diocesan GS members together to discuss where we have reached was a positive and good safe step. We cannot remain where we are and we must recognise that while maintaining our Christian integrity, we cannot afford to be out of step with our world.

I am sad to be stepping away from my Church of England commitments at this moment; it will be a big upheaval to leave our friends and supportive village community but I know it is the right thing to do for my family and the challenges that lie ahead. I will watch with interest from the Episcopal Church of Scotland, (where we have already been 'regular irregulars' at St John's Church in Princes Street Edinburgh for a number of years,) the path the Church of England now takes. I will continue to pray for the success of *Renewal and Reform* and Archbishop Justin, whose leadership, with the support of Archbishop John, has awakened and revitalised the Church.



What do we look like?

"O wad some Power the giftie gie us To see oursels as ithers see us!" Robert Burns

Sarah Tupling, Mary Bucknall, Catherine Farmbrough - Deaf Anglicans Together

Impressions of Synod from representative of Deaf Anglicans Together.

Sarah writes - On my first attendance it was scary, not knowing what to expect and on walking into the Main Hall, it felt awesome! We were in the presence of like-minded Christian people but there was an inadequacy felt by me – House of Bishops, House of Clergy and House of Laity, the jargon, the paperwork – everyone was all hearing and the struggle to keep up with the interpreters & following the protocol was an immense ordeal at times. However, our confidence was built up, by having pre-meetings with our National Advisor (Gill Behenna). I met with previous DAT representatives who gave me assurances it would 'get better'. Really?! (So I thought). I prayed and prayed. Later I found this verse which helped me so much:- *Hebrews 13:7* "Remember your leaders who taught you the word of God. Think of all the good that has come from their lives, and follow the example of their faith"



As I attended more Synod gatherings in London and York, my confidence grew (knowing we were walking in the footsteps of previous DAT representatives). I was there as one of three Deaf Christian representatives, to 'walk' amongst other Christians to make them aware of Jesus' work in our 'world' (Deaf community). What was missing? What was needed? What was wrong? The Holy Spirit had certainly come upon me and amongst us: *Acts 1:8* "But the Holy Spirit will come upon you and give you power. Then you will tell everyone about me in Jerusalem, in all Judea, in Samaria and everywhere in the world"

I relish the opportunity of getting to know more and more people at every gathering ensuring/asking what are they doing in their Dioceses for us, reminding them not to forget about Deaf people and remaining inclusive at all times in their work within His work. Learning too/sharing with others/gaining different experiences each time we gather. I consider the continuing of the spreading of good news 'by hand' (British Sign Language) to be such an important role of mine/ours.

Mary writes - As a newly-elected representative of Deaf Anglicans Together (DAT), I was eagerly looking forward to the inauguration of the tenth General Synod of the Church of England by Her Majesty the Queen in November 2015. It was an awe-inspiring occasion, held in the great circular Assembly Hall of Church House in Westminster, and one I will never forget.



Deaf Anglicans Together is a special constituency of the General Synod, and exists to promote opportunities for worship, mission and service by Deaf Christians among Deaf people nationwide in England. DAT is celebrating its 50th Anniversary in 2017, as it was founded in 1967 as the National Deaf Church Conference (NDCC).

Since 2005 DAT has been allowed to elect three Deaf representatives, clergy and lay, to the General Synod for each five-year term. DAT representatives are not allowed to vote, but they can observe the proceedings with the help of dedicated sign language interpreters, and file requests to speak or sign (with interpretation into English) in the debates. From the point of view of DAT as a whole, it is an amazing opportunity to make the particular access needs and concerns of Deaf people known to the wider Church and to ensure they are not marginalised or forgotten.

The Agenda for each group of sessions of the General Synod is published in advance, together with relevant background papers on each topic. It is very interesting indeed studying various aspects of Synod business, whether financial, legislative, liturgical or covering moral, social and political issues of the day. It is a challenge to find topics relevant to Deaf people within the prescribed Agenda and speak on them with vision and purpose.

All Synod business is conducted in an orderly fashion by the chairperson sitting on the dais. Everything about the General Synod, I learned, is regulated by the Standing Orders down to the minutiae of the voting procedure. This makes it easier to follow the proceedings, once the necessary protocol and jargon has been explained.

The diverse membership of the General Synod is also a strong feature, with members of religious communities, the armed forces, youth groups all represented. It is a wonderful opportunity to meet and mix with people from all regions of England, from Newcastle to Truro, from major cities to remote rural spots. All have united in a common search for what makes life more godly, more worthwhile, more fair. There is tremendous spiritual power at work there, I feel, underpinned by regular times of prayer and worship in between Synod business.

To sum up, it has been a wonderful experience to attend General Synod so far, both at Church House in Westminster and at York University. It is like being in the “Parliament” of the Church, but the tone of debate is civilised, not adversarial. It however remains to be seen whether the Church of England can remain united, over the question of same-sex marriage in churches and other issues. It is very much a “journeying together” on the unknown path ahead with God, and this gives the General Synod its particular strength and cohesiveness. Long may this last.

Catherine writes - I am one of three representatives of DAT (Deaf Anglicans Together) for General Synod.

I like to make my voice heard not only for the deaf people but also for others such as LGBT, BAME, autistic, blind etc and so the first speech I made was linked to it.

It is challenging for me as I like to think what I can do to support the General Synod.

(Editor’s Note : - I remember the first time that we had a signed speech in Synod. It was tremendously moving and gave those of us who are hearing a real insight into the DAT world. For the first time we were listening to an interpreted speech and recognised the difficulties that DAT representatives have in “keeping up”. It has been good to have these three perspectives. Thank you Sarah, Mary & Catherine)



Paul Fiddes, Ecumenical Representative

Impressions of Synod from an Ecumenical Representative

I have been the ecumenical representative for the Baptist Union of Great Britain on Synod since 2005. I think that, from this summer, this makes me the longest-serving representative, and I am a highly appreciative one. During these 12 years I have been a participant in spirit and empathy, occasionally in voice – though not of course in vote – in a number of issues that have preoccupied Synod.

Among them I count discussions about the Methodist Covenant, Fresh Expressions, the Anglican Covenant, women bishops, ordination courses, child-friendly eucharists, lay ministry and human sexuality. Weaving through all these different subjects, I notice, has been a consistent concern for the church as a community of ‘missionary disciples’.

My overwhelming sense has been that the Church of England is right to claim that it is ‘episcopally led and synodically governed’, and that this form of church leadership works well. I have been hugely impressed by the way that bishops work together in synod with clergy and laity, taking an initiative in the business brought to Synod but then submitting to being just part of a debate in which many voices are heard.

Not all voices have the same weight, but they are all listened to with courtesy and attention, and the standard of debate is very high. Faith, reason and experience join hands in remarkable ways. I have been impressed too by the way that local contexts are brought forward into conversation on this national level, so that a participant in Synod gains a picture of the life of the Church of England in quite vivid colour and detail. Nobody attending should fail to return home without having their horizons widened by discovering how congregations elsewhere than in their own patch hear the summons of Christ coming to them for their life and mission.

Notable too is the setting of debate in an attitude of worship and prayer. For all the traditional – and sometimes curious – panoply of making law as delegated by Parliament, it is clear that Synod regards its decisions as a matter of Christian discipleship, as well as responsibility to the state.

These observations should make clear why I am a grateful and enthusiastic ecumenical participant. When I was asked to write these impressions, I was, however, urged to include any more negative criticisms I might have of the experience, so here (in trepidation) they are. From the perspective of the ‘church meeting’ in my own tradition, I have wondered whether dividing into houses for some votes, usually on the most critical issues, offers a sense of the mind of Synod as a whole and what the church might be discerning to be the mind of Christ. Dividing into sections can mean that those gathered are not searching for a common mind but maintaining a particular viewpoint.

Again, an ecumenical participant will notice that an appeal to ‘the Church of Christ’ is sometimes followed by discussion limited to the Church of England, without exploring possibilities of partnership with other Christian churches. Similarly, gaining a vision of ‘the mission of God’ does not



always look for where God is at work in communities of other than Christian faith, or among people of no-faith concerned for the common good in general.

Further, as a representative of the 'nonconformist' or 'dissenting' tradition, which has reflected for centuries on the meaning of a church gathered by covenant, I notice that the idea of 'covenant' has been sometimes treated more as a contract than as a relationship of trust. Finally, speakers in Synod – as in all church assemblies – often assume that Holy Scripture speaks with one voice on an issue and Synod does not seem to give itself sufficient time to tease out diversities of interpretation.

But these criticisms really fade into the background behind my appreciation, as an academic theologian writing ecclesiology, of being able to see the Church of England living and breathing 'close up'. The Church is amazingly hospitable to its ecumenical representatives, generously allowing us to speak in debates when faithful Anglican participants wait for a long time to catch the chairperson's eye. Members of all three houses often mention to the ecumenical representatives that they have valued the viewpoint they offer from the wider church, and we receive a gracious reception that makes us very glad to be honorary members of Synod.

What's happening in the wider world that concerns us?

Robert Innes, Bishop in Europe

Brexit from a European Perspective

People in my diocese are deeply, deeply concerned about Brexit. Our concerns cover things like: residence rights, reciprocal health care, pension arrangements, uncertainty over planning and business contracts. If you are an elderly person who sold up to retire to rural France and now can't get back you can feel very frightened. But we are also concerned about this dramatic symbolic withdrawal of our country from European affairs.

I took part in the post-Brexit debate at General Synod. Speaker after speaker lined up to talk about social divisions in the UK. Few spoke about Europe. As someone who lives on the continent, it was sad for me that the moral case for the EU was never explained to the electorate.

Most people in the UK have seen the EU as a 'common market'. But its founding vision was intensely moral. To quote Rowan Williams: "the conviction that naked national competition, impregnable borders, clashing jurisdictions and mutually suspicious cultures have to be a thing of the past if we are interested in a justice and social well-being that is more than local." As Donald Tusk said recently, and from his post-communist Polish perspective, "for millions of people...the European Union is not about procedures. It is not about regulations. It is a guarantee that freedom, dignity, democracy and independence are no longer only our dreams, but our everyday reality."

At the time of the Brexit vote, some people thought that British opinion was in tune with rising nationalist sentiment across the continent. That proved to be wrong. Nationalist opinion has been contained in Austria, the Netherlands, and most recently France. It has been for decades and centuries a British foreign policy objective not to find ourselves with Europe united against us. That objective has now been lost. In the negotiations, our DexEU minister will be on one side of the table with Michel Barnier representing the other 27 EU members on the other.

I was speaking to an elderly German couple after a lovely confirmation service in Vienna. Why have you done this? They asked me. I tried to explain. No, 'why have you done this?', they insisted. 'This is a disaster. This is like the end of the second world war but with Britain defeated.' It is perhaps because Germans have such a high opinion of British pragmatism, fair-play and tolerance that they are so disappointed in us.

In this grim political situation, the Church of England yet retains a vital role. We have important ecumenical relationships with European partners. Now is the time to be investing in these. As the 'divorce' negotiations get underway, we can expect the level of acrimony to increase. There has never been a more important time for Christians in the UK to develop, build and sustain the warmest possible relationships with our brothers and sisters on the European mainland.



Rachel Treweek, Bishop of Gloucester

#liedentity

A number of members of General Synod will be aware that I have been endeavouring to use my voice to speak out on the issue of body image anxiety and to underline the message that who you are is more than how you look. As a baptised Christian I know that my deepest, truest identity is found in Jesus Christ and this is the liberating truth I want to share with young people.

Young boys and girls are bombarded with messages about what the 'perfect body image' is, which for many is undermining their true identity. We know that for these young people, having negative thoughts about how they look can impact on their entire life, causing deep unhappiness and contributing to poor mental health. Recent research from the YMCA and Dove Be Real Campaign, found that almost a third (30%) of secondary school pupils isolate themselves to avoid activities because of low body confidence while more than half (52%) regularly worry about how they look. And research from the Children's Society shows that there is an association between emotional problems and unhappiness with appearance.



In October 2016 I launched a social media campaign #liedentity with pupils from All Saints' Academy in Cheltenham, challenging negative body image and encouraging young people to look within to discover true value and beauty. This has given me a great opportunity to speak with young people about my own identity in Christ and my desire for every person to discover their worth and potential as a unique individual created in the image of God.

Since the #liedentity campaign began, a number of people from across the country have made contact to share stories from their own personal experiences. However, there has also been some criticism from people who consider that I should be using my voice more strongly to speak out on issues of social justice and global concern. My response is that I do use my voice and time to engage with these issues, but if we want to reach out to young people and enable them to engage with global issues such as the refugee crisis, world food poverty and genocide, then they need to be confident in who they truly are, the God-given talents they possess, and how their unique contribution to our common life can make a difference. Indeed, it is a matter for all of us as we enter into debates on different subjects within General Synod. If we are to go on discovering what it means to be members together of the Body of Christ, then each of us needs to go on discovering who we are in Christ.

Over the last year it has been good to have the opportunity to network and partner with organisations including the Children's Society, the YMCA and Messy Church, and I'm delighted that the Diocese of Gloucester is now organising a one day national conference on Tuesday 20 February 2018. Every diocesan bishop has been asked to send three representatives. The aim is to share knowledge, experiences and resources that help young people discover their true self-worth; and it is hoped that we will explore how as Christians we can better engage with issues of identity in young people and play an active role to promote body confidence in the young people with whom we engage.

For more information about the liedentity campaign visit - www.gloucester.anglican.org/parish-resources/communications/liedentity. If you would be interested to hear more about our conference please contact Lucy Taylor, Head of Communications ltaylor@glosdioc.org.uk, or 01452 835515

That Debate! Differing Insights.

Simon Taylor, Canon Chancellor, Derby Cathedral

Pressing the right buttons on sexuality

The theologian John Milbank tweeted after the debate in February that clergy who voted not to take note of the bishop's report should be disciplined. Well that would include me. I voted not to take note of the Bishops' report. I did so because I felt that the "new tone" that the Bishops called for was not evident in the report itself. The report said nothing about the nature of same-sex relationships as loving, which disturbed me. Nor did it have anything to say about discerning the Holy Spirit in the conversations that we had been part of, or in the way that LGBTBI+ people are a gift to the church. I was also troubled that the bishops were not offering us a model in how to live together through serious disagreement, but instead had found a place in which they could agree whilst the cost was born elsewhere in the church. In short, I found little in the paper of which I wanted to 'take note'!



When it came to the debate, however, that "new tone" was abundantly present from all sides. I can honestly say that it was the most gracious debate that I have ever been part of at the General Synod. There were strong feelings in a number of directions, but the whole thing was conducted with care. We heard from those who were sorry for not speaking up in favour of blessings; from gay people who are living celibate lives that they believe are called for by the Bible; from Bishops wanting to apologise for any hurt caused by their report; from gay Christians who are partnered and find their relationships reflect the love of Christ. The debate was honest, frank, and good natured. I hope and pray that future debates will continue in this way.

The Archbishops' letter to members following the February group of sessions offers hope. The "radical inclusion" that Archbishop Justin spoke about in the debate will be challenging. I take this to be the difficult road of ensuring that all people, whatever their sexuality or their views on the subject, are recognised as Christians. The deep disagreements that divide us as Christians make this hard, but if we are to find a way through this quagmire then it is the hard road that we must follow.

The promised teaching document will be difficult. I hope it will model how different views are held with theological integrity on a whole range of issues. But above all, I hope that it will hold clearly to the Archbishops' promise that in the on-going debate "no person is a problem or an issue". The worst thing about the February Synod debate was the group work that preceded it. I attended my group, and was glad to be back with those with whom I had shared in the July conversations. But the 'case studies' were insulting.

Early in his time at Lambeth, Archbishop Justin spoke of some same-sex relationships as being of a "stunning quality". Somehow, the Church of England needs to be able to recognise this, and to do so with integrity and with joy. I hope that day can come soon.

James Dudley-Smith, Bath & Wells

The Marriage & Same Sex Relationships Debate

Thank you for reading what I have to say, especially as I feel something of an outsider to the Open Synod Group.

I said in my election address: 'I am committed to welcoming and caring for all, and I hold to traditional Christian views on marriage and sexual practice, believing that our loving God has given his commands for the good of all.'

Jesus is good news for all, and especially for those who know they are not good, sorted, clean-living and religious. And I myself am not any of those things, though I carry titles like Reverend and Rector and Rural Dean. So Jesus is good news for me, the good news I most need.

I know that what I believe about marriage and sex makes me sound as if I am pointing fingers at others and calling them unsound, unsafe, or unworthy. I am very sensitive to the accusation of being 'holier-than-thou' because I know that I am not holier than anybody. Yet the church is called towards holiness as well as to mission. And that pair of callings stretches us sometimes to a cross. Holiness is distinctiveness, standing out, being different from the world, from its ways of living, speaking and thinking. You could say that holiness calls us away from the world.

But the missionary calling is towards the world, to stand in it with compassion, and to love it with God's great gospel. GS2055 was flawed, but at least it attempted to wrestle with these two imperatives, while the February debate seemed simply to pitch them against one another. The temptations are strong to a safe distant holiness in a like-minded huddle, which compromises our mission. The temptations are strong also to compromise our holiness for the sake of our mission, so as to seem more acceptable to the world we are called to reach. But if God can be holy without compromising his mission, and missionary without compromising his holiness, then that is our way forwards too.

It would be convenient in our western social setting to agree that the sexual expression of your commitment with anyone you love could be included in the arena of Christian holiness. But I really believe that marriage is for a man and a woman, and that that is the only God-given context for a sexual relationship. I find this to be the teaching of the Scriptures, of the Christian tradition and of Jesus himself. And so I have to believe that our loving God who spared not his own Son but graciously gave him up for us all, has the best interests of all humanity at heart when he sets the parameters for marriage and sex in this way.

That is hard to say, and I cannot claim to know how hard that is for gay and lesbian people to hear. And yet I believe it, and I believe we should all believe it, in spite of the cross that it will mean we have to carry as God's church together.



Don't forget

THE QUIZ

All members of General Synod are cordially invited!

Saturday evening July 8th

in

the Exhibition Centre from 10.00pm

after the Lay Meeting

Quizmaster Tim Hind

(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.

All donations (after expenses) to Charity



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Mr John Freeman, Chester - (Treasurer)

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