



Open Synod Group

Newsletter

Summer 2018

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

Editor : Tim Hind, Bath & Wells

Editorial

As I write this we have had the first instalments of the IICSA Inquiry and the Anniversaries of Grenfell Tower and London Bridge amongst others. It is remarkable to think that these events show how the Church of England can respond well or badly to things going on within the wider world. The harrowing stories from the bereaved in the Grenfell Tower Inquiry and the IICSA evidence of the disgraceful way in which survivors of abuse have been treated by the Church make for salutary reading for all involved in trying to make the world a safer place for people to live and flourish.

I was very grateful to +Peter Hancock for his timely article, reflecting on the safeguarding issues for our Church. This, coupled with being able to secure two different perspectives on how the church helped to deal with the situations following London Bridge and Grenfell, has made this newsletter somewhat more reflective and poignant. I believe that our readiness to engage positively with the IICSA Inquiry will also begin to show that our Church is able to respond appropriately to safeguarding issues as time moves on.

Once again, I am grateful to Canon Bruinvels in bringing us an insight into the workings of one of the more obscure features of the Church of England.

As our Chair reflects, the Open Synod Group acts as a neutral player and does not specifically endorse any views expressed in this Newsletter.



Chair's Reflections

Robin Back, Chair, Open Synod Group

Firstly, I must thank our Members for electing me to the Chairman's role at our AGM in February this year. The Open Synod Group (OSG) sets out to be a home for all those on General Synod seeking a space free of pressures and to meet in Christ's name for companionship and discussion so I am honoured to be Chairman and will work to maintain and expand the Group's presence.

At the same time, I should like to pay tribute to Anne Martin, my predecessor in this role and to wish her and her husband all happiness in their new life in Edinburgh.

We are best known for our popular Saturday night Quiz at the July Group of Sessions where we offer a chance to relax and enjoy each other's company. July 2018 plans are already afoot and flyers released. The timings have changed this year with the removal of evening sessions from the Synod's agenda. We therefore plan to start at 9:00 PM.

The OSG is also particularly well-suited to hosting discussion groups and/or presentations on a wide range of topics. We have no 'platform' of our own and therefore take no collective views on matters of interest to Synod. Uniquely, I think this allows us to present potentially controversial issues to Synod members in a neutral format. There is no shortage of issues facing our Church so we hope to develop this aspect at future groups of Sessions.

I invite readers of our Newsletter to consider membership of OSG if the foregoing resonates with their own views and experiences of General Synod. Our website can be found at www.opensynodgroup.org.uk where you can find details of upcoming events, present and past copies of our newsletter, contact details of our Committee Members and a Membership application form.

Finally, I must also thank my hard-working committee without whom nothing gets done!

With all best wishes.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robin Back', with a horizontal line underneath.

Safeguarding

The Rt Revd Peter Hancock - Bishop of Bath & Wells - Lead Bishop for Safeguarding

As we approach July's General Synod, which will once again have an important focus on safeguarding, I think it is important to stop and reflect on the Church's journey; our history (with many shameful episodes), our present (a commitment to improve but a work in progress) and our hopes for the future (and the current debates around that). Many of you will remember the [2013 debate and public apology](#) to survivors of church-related abuse - unanimously endorsed by Synod. It was a moving, challenging and a stark reminder of how we have failed the vulnerable among us, both through abuse and then our poor and inadequate response. This was illustrated at the CofE's [IICSA hearings](#) earlier this year where I gave evidence along with a number of other church leaders and advisers including the current and former Archbishops of Canterbury.



A range of themes are emerging from IICSA and we will receive our first report in the autumn (which will also include the Peter Ball hearing in July). What emerged most strongly - around specific areas including mandatory reporting, independence, reparations, granting of PTO and more - was that our response to survivors has not been good enough.

I took on the role of lead safeguarding bishop two years ago, taking over from Bishop Paul Butler - and I totally endorse [his reflections on his time in the role](#). I work closely with the National Safeguarding Team, NST, (previously there was only a 0.5 National Adviser) who have overseen significant changes in policy and procedure, endorsed by the House of Bishops. There are now regulations for all diocesan safeguarding advisers (DSAs), strengthened policy (for which all church officers should have 'due regard'), diocesan audits including progress reviews, and vital training - IICSA heard very positive endorsements of the C4 training module on disclosure, mandatory for all senior diocesan staff and being rolled out by the NST.

Current initiatives to inform our future work include the receiving reports from the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) on their independent audits of dioceses and from Sir Roger Singleton into the adequacy of the Church of England's Past Cases Review, the research being conducted by SCIE on good responses to survivors, the development of the Safe Spaces project improve responses to survivors in conjunction with the Roman Catholic Church, the appointment of an independent chair to the National Safeguarding Panel and of course our ongoing conversations at this Synod. There is also discussion about 'outsourcing' and 'independence' following criticism that the Church 'should not mark its own homework'. But there is one thing we must be clear about - we cannot absolve responsibility for safeguarding, it cannot be 'done to the Church'. We must own it in every diocese and in every Cathedral, parish and chaplaincy. This Synod will need to grapple with a number of issues and this may include whether some form of external accountability is needed to improve our work in safeguarding. My prayer is that as Synod members we all own and take seriously the commitment to make the Church a safer place for all.

Full links (embedded above)

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/safeguarding/safeguarding-news-and-statements/synod-supports-safeguarding-apology>

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/safeguarding/iicsa>

<http://cofecomms.tumblr.com/post/147045783517/more-than-box-ticking-needed>

Grenfell Tower & London Bridge - Reflections on our Response

Grenfell Tower - The Church Responds

Rt Rev Graham Tomlin, Bishop of Kensington

In the days after the fire, with the smoke from Grenfell Tower still in the air, the Council and the government seemed unable to respond with the speed and flexibility required. The institution that did was perhaps unexpected: the church.

Along with local mosques and community centres, local churches opened their doors and become sites for respite, sympathy, cups of tea, a listening and praying ear, as well quickly turning into pop-up depots for donations and the many volunteers who flocked into the area wanting to help. In time, the relief effort kicked in, but the reason the church was able to help in the immediate days after the disaster was because it didn't need to come in to the local community to offer pastoral support – it was already there.

About a month after the fire, I began some conversations with survivors and bereaved families, as well as local faith leaders about some kind of memorial event, remembering the dead and offering some hope for the future. What emerged was the National Grenfell Tower Memorial Service at St Paul's Cathedral on the six-month anniversary of the fire. Even though it was a Christian cathedral and most of the victims had been Muslim, its place as the national venue for commemoration made it the obvious choice. If the church's first response was pastoral, this was the church in liturgical mode. A service that combined lament, remembrance and expressions of hope was able to bring those affected together in the context of worship. As I said in my sermon at the time: "There is something about a Cathedral – it is a place where we are aware we are in the presence of something - someone - bigger than ourselves. As we cross the threshold into this building, it doesn't matter whether we are politicians, religious leaders, volunteers, survivors, bereaved, residents – we are all equal in the eyes of God. Love makes no distinctions. We are all neighbours to each other and we are called to love our neighbours."

There have many such opportunities to speak into the issues that Grenfell raises. The fire touched a nerve in our social and political life, shining a spotlight on issues such as social inequality, housing and immigration that few other tragedies have done. Local clergy have continued to offer pastoral help, chair local Council initiatives, provide space for highly-charged meetings, or assist in co-ordinating mental health provision. I have tried to keep in touch with some of those who lived in the Tower or bereaved families, offering support in their quiet but dignified campaign to get to the truth of what happened, so that justice can be done, and reconciliation and a better future be won for this diverse but traumatised community. It has been an unexpected journey, requiring sensitivity, wisdom, prayer, emotion and time. It is far from over, and yet signs of hope and progress are slowly becoming visible for that better future.



Grenfell Tower & London Bridge - Reflections on our Response

London Bridge - Coping with Tragedy

The Very Revd Andrew Nunn, Dean of Southwark

In June we commemorated the first anniversary of the terrorist attack on London Bridge and the Borough Market, Southwark Cathedral having been at the heart of the events of that dreadful evening. There have been other first anniversaries this year, in Westminster, Manchester, Finsbury Park and Grenfell Tower. Each was a scene of tragic events that brought people face to face with terror, in one way or another.

Coping with tragedy is something that we have to do at various times of our life; there is clearly not one size that fits all in dealing with it, every tragedy is different. In the immediate aftermath of the terrible and terrifying events in which we were caught up a number of things happened that I think became enormously significant for the whole community. In this I'm reflecting on how the community rather than individuals have coped. In Southwark Cathedral we have the memorial to the Marchioness disaster. This August sees the 29th anniversary of the death of 51 people when that pleasure boat was struck by another vessel on the Thames close to the cathedral and sank with such a huge loss of young lives. Living with that memorial has taught me many things about tragedy and these tragic events and principally that though when it happens all involved experience the same event over time the needs of the various groups involved develop in very different ways. The bereaved and survivors do not cope in identical ways.

The same will be true after these more recent atrocities. But initially we were able to minister to the community as a whole. One initial response was about the rehallowing of what had been desecrated. I'm not here thinking of sacred space, the cathedral in this instance. Instead, we needed to think how to make holy what evil had trampled upon. Our response was to take liturgy onto the street, praying, censuring, sprinkling and reinhabiting the space.

The next challenge was how to deal with the mountain of flowers that had been left by people as a practical expression of shock and concern. They had to be moved but without offending the sensibilities of those who had laid them. The local council asked us to look after that on behalf of the community. So we gathered and with prayer and with dignity the whole community loaded the flowers onto the lorries. Not a card was thrown away but has been archived; the flowers have been composted to be used to plant a tree in memory.

Finally, the decision was made not to repair all the damage that had happened to the Cathedral. The Sacristy door in particular had been forced open by the police using baton rounds. The oak is pitted by the force used; it is scarred and bears the scars. The option was to repair it but we have chosen to keep it. Like the wounds in the hands of Jesus, like the wound in his side the building bears the marks of the violence and will do. It is a way of being honest about tragedy and loss and grief.

A year has passed but the tragic loss remains. Some will move on, others will be unable to, at the moment. The church stands with both for we never forget the cross and never forget the resurrection.



The Queen Victoria Clergy Fund

Canon Peter Bruinvels - Chair, Queen Victoria Clergy Fund

The Queen Victoria Clergy Fund ('QVCF') was constituted by Royal Charter on 7 December 1897 and supplemental charters of 5 September 1924, 29 June 1942 and 19 July 2005. It is a Church of England registered charity and its principal office is Church House, London SW1P 3AZ.



The Charitable Objectives of the Fund are:-

- “the relief of need, hardship and distress among clergy of the Church of England and their families and dependants, in particular (but not exclusively) by the payment of annual grants to the diocesan organisations with similar objects; and
- Generally to advance religion by advancing the charitable work of the Church of England through providing material support to its clergy.”

The trustees have to confirm that that they have referred to the guidance contained in the Charity Commission’s general guidance on public benefit when reviewing the Fund’s objectives and in planning future activities and setting the grant making policy for the year.

Membership:-

QVCF’s Patron is Her Majesty The Queen; the Archbishops of Canterbury and York are Joint Presidents with the Bishops of the Dioceses of the Provinces of Canterbury and York as Vice-Presidents. The Chairman is myself and I have seven elected Council Members to support me.

Governance:

Each Diocese nominates one Lay Member, following their election to General Synod to serve for a period of five years. There are forty-two members. Christopher Palmer is our Secretary. Members meet at the Annual General Meeting in February and for a social in York during the July Synod.

The Council meets at least twice a year to agree the broad strategy and specific areas of activity for the fund, including consideration of grant making, investment and risk management policies and performance. All trustees give freely of their time and no trustee remuneration is paid.

Investment Powers and restrictions:

- To deposit and invest funds in any manner having due regard to the suitability of investments and the need for diversification
- To delegate the management of investments with every transaction reported promptly to Council and the performance of such investments reviewed regularly with the Council. It should be noted that our investment policy is long term and medium risk and such delegation arrangements are reviewed at least once a year.

Reserves Policy:

Given that grants to each Diocese are paid in arrears from income received the previous year, supplemented by capital from the sale of investments, mainly held in liquid investments, the Council has resolved that there is no reason to maintain cash reserves over and above income received.

Annual Results for the year Ended 30 June 2017

The Fund generated a total surplus of £376,833 with the capital value of the Fund's portfolio increasing by £367,720. The balance sheet stood at £4,366,169

During the year and under my Chairmanship, the Fund distributed £150,000 to the Dioceses in furtherance of the Charity's aims. Such grants ranged from £1,453 to £8,240. In considering the amount of capital transferred to income, the Council carefully balances the current needs of beneficiaries with the likely needs of future beneficiaries.

For the past two years, the Council has asked each Bishop to detail examples of how such grants have been used. The anonymous examples were fascinating. It is clear that our Bishops greatly value such grants and use them for hardship payments; marriage breakdowns; healthcare; counselling; brief holiday breaks; adopting two small children; wheelchair provision; car repairs; a shower; children's clothes and retreats.

As the Archbishop of York wrote "as you can imagine, the grant from the Queen Victoria Clergy Fund was very gratefully received". His Grace went on to write "I pray that you will be encouraged by hearing many more stories of where your work is making a tangible difference in the lives of so many clergy.

The Council and Trustees are proud to be part of the Queen Victoria Clergy Fund, playing their part and more importantly helping make a difference for our Clergy.

Synod Contacts

OSG Officers & Committee Members

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

Tim Hind, Bath & Wells (Vice-Chair & Newsletter Editor)

Mrs Penny Allen, Lichfield - (Minute Secretary)

Mr John Freeman, Chester - (Treasurer)

Simon Talbot, Ely - (Committee Member)

Janet Perrett, Ely - (Committee Member)

OSG NEWSLETTER EDITOR Tim Hind

Contact tim.hind252@btinternet.com 07977 580374