

## GENERAL SYNOD REPORT - JULY 2012

### Friday 6<sup>th</sup> July

How many times have I said that this or that Synod will or will not be historic? Well this Synod is likely to be historic but it might be for all the wrong reasons.

It started with the House of Laity and the Convocations of York & Canterbury meeting separately to discuss the amended legislation on the consecration of Women Bishops. The House of Laity met from 2pm in the Central Hall and the two Convocations met elsewhere. The Convocation of York met to debate exactly the same motions as the House of Laity. The Convocation of Canterbury met as a single convocation to start with and subsequently as two separate Houses. In the end all 5 sessions resulted in successful motions (1 on the Measure and 1 on the Amending Canon).

Almost immediately after the votes were announced the Central Hall was struck by lightning. Déjà vu?

The purpose of the debates was to secure the passage of the legislation through to Monday 9<sup>th</sup>. Many people who might have voted against voted in favour just to ensure that they could get the legislation through. It had all the aspects of a Palm Sunday "Hosanna" while waiting to shout "Crucify" later on. The voting on the main motion was as follows in the House of Laity

For	Against	Abstentions
123	53	0

It is important not to play the numbers game as a number of Anglo-Catholics failed to arrive in the debating chamber in time to vote and so the number who voted against may be slightly too low. Likewise a number voted in favour so that they could get it through to Monday where it is possible should it come to a final vote that they might vote against. The rest of Friday was taken up with the usual debate on the Agenda and Questions. The only bright moment was the Archbishop of Turku and Finland talking about his desire to have the women bishops within the Porvoo community able to minister fully within the Church of England. He also spoke of the dangers of secularisation/privatisation of faith within his country.

I attended a very interesting Fringe Meeting which explored the activities of ACTS 435 ([www.acts435.org.uk/](http://www.acts435.org.uk/)).

### Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> July

After a Standing Committee of the House of Laity first thing, I was able to engage with a very insightful exploration of scripture as part of a small group looking at John 18 and linking it to a contemplation on the matter of an Olive. I hadn't realised that Gethsemane means an Olive Press.

We had a good debate about World Mission which re-emphasised the need to continue our own Zambia link within Bath & Wells but recommended the need for all members of the Church of England to engage with World Mission opportunities.

The legislative business was fairly unexceptional but it is worth pointing out that from some time in the future it will be illegal for a priest to be a member of a proscribed organisation – e.g. the BNP.

After a presentation and question session on the Church Commissioners activity in 2011, we had a debate on the way forward for Fresh Expressions (e.g. Messy Church, Café Church).

This all makes Saturday sound really thin. However, there were other things going on.

At lunch time I attended a meeting about the Near Neighbours Scheme (<http://www.cuf.org.uk/near-neighbours/>). This emerged from the Presence & Engagement report some years back. In the evening, after a brief excursion to the Ecumenical Members Reception I went to a very good meeting (hosted by the Bishop of Bath & Wells) about the Anglican Alliance (<http://www.anglicanalliance.org/>).

The 3 fringe meetings I have attended so far are all about helping people through either financial or advocacy help to survive in different circumstance. In one case the help is very personal and in other cases the help is more institutionalised through church involvement or agency connections.

Saturday night always provides for a little bit of entertainment and this was admirably supplied by the Open Synod Group.

## **Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> July**

The Minster service was very moving if only for the presentation from the Sunday School to ++ Rowan or the singing of Psalm 150 by the Choir. It was followed by a reception given by the Archbishops' Council which due to weather conditions was in the Chapter House. The Archbishop talked about the ways in which we can deal with frustration – especially when the perceived cause is other people.

The afternoon was cluttered with a mixture of Liturgical Business (Additional Eucharistic Prayers) and Archbishops' Council retrospective on 2011 and a prospective on the Budget for 2013. This was followed by a fascinating look at the way in which the churches responded to the August 2011 riots and what lessons could be learned from that experience. The debate was introduced by the Bishop of Bath & Wells.

In the evening I attended a fringe meeting on the subject of Women on the Margins sponsored by Christian Aid (<http://www.christianaid.org.uk/>) and looking at the way in which various UN initiatives help in this area. In particular it touched on the UN Commission on the Status of Women (<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/>). The final debate of the day was about the continued concern by many regarding the possible marginalisation of Christians within our Society on matters such as the wearing of crosses and the right to express religious views and opinions. The Synod agreed to the motion but there is a great danger that there could be some specific legal challenges ahead that will test the waters significantly.

## **Monday 9<sup>th</sup> July**

You could be forgiven for thinking that the report this time around is a little lightweight. It is important to realise that the Elephant in the Room was always the debates that were due on Monday.

Much of what happened from Friday evening through to Sunday evening was interspersed with multiple conversations between Synod members and with the press on the likely way that the debates would go.

The debate on Monday was to reflect the debates that had already taken place on Friday in separate houses. If successful there would have been the addition of a Petition to the Crown to promote the amending Canon 30.

However, it was clear that there would be no appetite for the formal approval of the Women Bishops' Measure as a member of the Steering Committee immediately proposed an adjournment so that the troublesome Clause 5.1.(c) could be reconsidered by the House of Bishops and brought back in November.

This call for an adjournment was successful and so the business for the rest of Monday and Tuesday was brought forward. In addition a contingency debate which had started on Saturday when a gap appeared in the agenda was also finished.

As a result of these later deliberations we agreed to support the activity of the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) which is seeking to help with Human Rights issues in Israel & Palestine. There was a lot of lobbying over this including threats that it would damage UK / Israeli relations.

We also agreed to allow PCCs to set up trusts in certain circumstances and to ensure that Vacancy-in-See Committees have a minimum of 21 people.

Farewells were said for the Senior Stenographer (Margaret Stevenson) and the Bishops of Beverley and Blackburn.

Because we are now to be reconvened in November, the farewell to ++Rowan did not take place and that will happen when we are in London in the late Autumn.

Due to the adjournment Synod ended at Supper time on the Monday and members departed from York either that evening or on the following morning.

## **Final Reflections**

This has been a particularly difficult Synod because even now it seems as though people are not speaking clearly. A lot of confusion and mistrust developed following the House of Bishops' Meeting in May. How well founded the mistrust was is a matter of conjecture. Needless to say it set hares running and so the adjournment may just give us a breathing space to allow things to calm down.

What it has meant is that all the debates that went on around the Women Bishop debates were conducted in a subdued atmosphere with the greatest animation occurring during the debate on the EAPPI.

**Tim Hind**

**Bath & Wells**