

GENERAL SYNOD REPORT – JULY 2013

Friday 5th

Nobody knew what the next 5 days of discussion and debate would lead to. There were a number of different strands to the weekend in York and it was interesting to see so many that were interrelated and so themes threaded through our debates and times of reflection.

Although much of the pressure was on attempting to find a way through the maze we had created for ourselves over the women bishop's issue the most crucial debates in my mind were those related to the challenges of the quinquennium (Common Good, Growth & Reimagining Ministry) and safeguarding.

So it was that Archbishop Justin called us to pray for a Renewal of Prayer and the Religious Life and for Reconciliation.

The House of Laity met before Synod started to receive a presentation from the Directors for Ministry and Education (both priests) and to have a discussion about the way forward for Lay Ministry and the possible way in which support could be given nationally. The discussion was really good and lively and we were left with a lot of contributions unmade due to time constraints. These will be submitted between now and September with a view to furthering the cause in due course. One clear call was for the laity to emerge from underneath an overtly clericalised mechanism for Lay Learning.

Much of the rest of Friday was subdued and rather mundane as most were preparing emotionally for the following day.

Saturday 6th

All of Saturday morning and afternoon were spent in a closed session dealing with the current proposals for legislation over women bishops. The morning was spent discussing our reactions to the previous November 2012 debate and attempting to understand the positives and negatives for us from that experience. In the run up to lunch, Option 4 was looked at in terms of how people felt the option would fare and what impact it would have if implemented on various groups. This was valuable as it meant everyone needed to be able to articulate how they felt someone else would be impacted by our decisions.

After lunch we proceeded to look at Option 1 in the same way. It was suggested that we looked at the other two options but this was not pursued sufficiently and most of the work applied to Options 1 and 4 was inclusive of some discussion of these anyway. (Papers can be found which explain all the issues on the [General Synod](#) website. The "women bishops" papers are GS1886)

In the late afternoon we were introduced to Forum Theatre which is a technique for helping to change the course of events by seeing a drama as spectators and then reviewing the play as spect-actors with members of the audience replacing the actors on stage in an attempt to arrive at a different ending.

The drama was centred on a Big Brother House scene where the protagonists (highly caricatured) are disagreeing in a very tense way. The Bishop is invited to solve the problem in 3 minutes or suffer the death of "Bill" (anthropomorphised version of the draft measure).

Most attempts were unsuccessful and sadly Bill passed away but there was a lot of fun had as more and more extremely inventive attempts were made.

In the evening we discussed the Challenges of the Quinquennium. The purpose of the debate was to allow stories to emerge of how the church can be connected with the nation for the common good, achieve spiritual and numerical growth and present a reimagined practice of ministry. So the theme of Ministry had come through strongly in the House of Laity meeting on Friday and was now being debated in the context of the 3 Challenges.

The Archbishop of York said there was only one way to grow membership of churches and that was "Prayer & Parties". So I am looking forward to a very different set of activities across the nation's churches over the next few years. Interestingly, when I returned from York, I had Deanery Synod in which the Chapter had prepared a meal and we had a quiz. Great way to get people together and talking.

And so it was that Synod finished the day around the campus in groups gathering to relax. For many of us, this takes place in the Open Synod Group Quiz which always includes a music round requiring us to name something about a piece of music and this inevitably leads to a magnificent sing song end to the day.

Sunday 7th

The Eucharist in the Minster is always a grand affair and once again for it was a great privilege to administer the chalice to local members of the Cathedral community and fellow members of Synod.

The interesting debates were the debates on Safeguarding and Welfare Reform. Having said that the other debates were more "nuts and bolts" debates and could be seen to be introverted. However, the Faculty Jurisdiction changes were very pertinent to enabling the church to be more responsive to missionary opportunities and so the theme of Mission emerged as it had done in the Challenges debate.

The safeguarding debate was uncomfortable with harrowing stories. This was an area which we need to get absolutely right or else we might as well give up on all the rest our mission. The survivors' statement was a right call against the church but the apology that came with the motion was a good start for future activity.

The Welfare Reform debate was a good way of airing our concerns over the Government's plans. An attempt to politicise the debate was resisted and the motion was passed with one dissenting voice. Again, this was a debate that had echoes with other things on the agenda – in particular the Common Good aspects of the Challenges debate.

Monday 8th

The major activity today was bound to be centred on the Women Bishop's debate and the reorganisation of Dioceses in the Province of York. Additionally there were

going to be presentations on the performance of the Church Commissioners and the Archbishops' Council except that in the end timing meant that the former was severely reduced and the latter was not done.

The Women Bishop's debate was presented as a proposal to accept Option 1. Various amendments were proposed which explored Synod's attitude to the other options and some variations. In addition there were amendments to include a mandatory grievance procedure and also to ensure that facilitated discussions formed part of the ongoing process.

One innovation regarding process was the idea that we could dispense with the Revision Committee and use an extended Steering Group to effect the early stages of the process with the use of Facilitated Discussions, running alongside. This, known as the Broadbent Cunning Plan, caused a mantra of "I agree with Pete" to be used by several speakers during the debate.

The impact of the facilitated discussions on the previous Saturday had a marked effect on the conduct of this debate in which many spoke differently about the way forward compared to how one might have expected them to do following the November train crash!

In the end the motion was only amended to include the need for a mandatory grievance procedure (making the idea of a Formal Declaration with Teeth) and the continuation of reconciliation techniques in the form of Facilitation.

The other major debate for the day was the Dissolution of the Dioceses debate. If this were to go ahead a new Diocese of Leeds would replace the existing Dioceses of Bradford, Wakefield and Ripon & Leeds. In the run-up to the Synod, Ripon & Leeds and Bradford had agreed to the new Diocese as had the two neighbouring Dioceses of Sheffield and Blackburn who would have picked up some of the extremities that were to be shaved off the new "Super" Diocese.

Only Wakefield had objected and the rumour was that the opposition had been led by the existing Diocesan Bishop and hadn't been helped by the fact that there had not been a secret ballot when it was debated in their Diocesan Synod. It may be that these reports have no substance but it was clear that many of their General Synod Representatives were in favour of the new scheme.

It is important to note that as a result there will now be 2 fewer Diocesan Bishops in the Northern Province and so the debate on the following day about North v South representation becomes more poignant.

Tuesday 9th

In a change to the agenda, Bishop Angaelos of the Council of Oriental Orthodox Churches addressed Synod on the situation in Egypt. He described how there had been an increase in attacks on Christians in recent years but that he was avoiding the temptation to play the victim card. He was relieved that Dr Morsi had been deposed, not least because otherwise it would have meant a very difficult few days for the Bishop as Dr Morsi had been intending to visit the UK the following week.

The rest of the morning was spent on discussing electoral reform. There were some minor non-contentious issues and a couple of major ideas that needed airing in depth.

There is clearly a concern, expressed previously that the representation of clergy and laity is unbalanced by the current 30:70 ratio between representatives of the Northern & Southern Provinces when the ratio of members is 27:73 or thereabouts. The outcry from the North was that changing it would diminish the Northern Voice and that it was a small price for the South to have to pay for a happier Northern Province. (My subsequent suggestion might not go down well but if sufficient of the dioceses neighbouring the Northern Province were to be annexed we could change the ratio to almost 50:50).

The other issue is that of the representative nature of the House of Laity as a result of the current electoral process. Ideas that are coming to the fore are broadly rehashes of the arguments raised 16 years ago in the Bridge Report. The questions of whether it would be better to have Universal Suffrage or some form of renewed Electoral College (sitting to the side of the Deanery Synod structures) were discussed. The Electoral College might be two additional representatives appointed at each APCM specifically for the purpose or the PCC itself. The debate was an initial airing of views and nothing was decided. Concerns have been expressed over a number of issues, including whether the problem that is being addressed is well defined, whether the Deanery Synod would be marginalised as a result and whether there is sufficiently good ways of identifying membership to fulfil the Universal Suffrage method.

Over the weekend we said farewell to the Bishops of Exeter, Europe, Liverpool and Hereford but said our welcome to Jacqui Philips (the new Colin Podmore!). Strangely we didn't say goodbye to the Bishop of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich even though he is being translated to Lambeth and so it was, I believe, his last session of Synod.

I have always said that when I leave Synod happy it will be my last Synod. So ... I have once again left with some irritations.

I am becoming less enthusiastic towards some people's desire to play with the voting system. I am finding some interventions counterproductive. What disappointed me more was the Forward in Faith reflection on Synod that was published shortly afterwards which attempted to look positive but seemed to me to be some general suggestions that they were pleased that current voting patterns indicated good support for their opposition to legislation to allow women to become bishops. This is in advance of formal legislation coming to the table.

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