

## General Synod, York, July 2015

### Friday 10th

And so the gathering started in York University for the final group of sessions for the General Synod. What an amazing 5 years it has been! It has been such a privilege to have been part of a group that has genuinely made a significant change to the Church of England.

I have spoken in earlier reports of Synod of the dramatic twists and turns of the progress of the biggest issue that faced us during these five years. What is most important to me to record here is the massive change in tone of debates and relationships between synod members at all levels. You can sense a mood for synod and even now it still gets a little tetchy. However, as you will read later, members are now sensitive to the situation and frequently apologies are made and tensions diffused.

My first duty and joy on arriving in York was to host the farewell lunch for Dr Philip Giddings. He and I do not come from the same persuasion on many aspects. However, it has been a surprise to both of us, and to many others, that we have worked well together over the last five years. After a couple of reflections from David Ashton, Father of the House, (42 years on Synod) and Chris Corteen (5 years), I paid tribute to Philip's staunch support for the laity during his 30 years of service.

When the formal part of synod started we had a couple of powerful Archiepiscopal addresses and the normal debate on the agenda.

In her address to Synod, the Archbishop of Uppsala, Most Revd Antje Jackelen, called us to stand together in the face of the challenges of secularism and environmental change.

Archbishop Sentamu spoke about prayer as a transformative mechanism, because it focuses on glorifying God, in a reflection on Archbishop Janani Luwum. He went on to say that re-evangelisation will only happen when we all become witnesses. He also spoke about solidarity and illustrated this by saying that it is easy to destroy a single page of a book but not a whole book. He then physically did so to prove his point.

Two appointments of significance have been made which require Synod's approval. The first was that of the new Secretary General where his appointment was announced a while ago but where, by virtue of a recent change in standing orders, it became official prior to this group of sessions.

Second was the appointment of Matthew Frost as a member of the Archbishops' Council. This needed affirmation by the Synod, which was duly given. Matthew is currently Chief Executive of Tearfund from which he steps down in October.

One of the areas of Synod that is so vital (when needed) is the safety net for members and chairs of debates that come from the standing orders. Normally they are as invisible as the air but come into their own when things become critical. A committee looks after them and from time to time (at the request of others) proposes changes. Most of the time this adds a layer of complexity to an increasingly convoluted set of rules the justification of which in some cases go back decades and which include many archaic words (some in Latin).

It had been decided, therefore, that they should be translated into modern English. The end of the quinquennium afforded us the ideal deadline for achieving this innovation. By this means the new shiny synod will have a new set of shiny standing orders. The technical term for this exercise of translation without change is called consolidation.

It was, however, also important to deal with two other sets of changes. The first was required to simplify the way in which questions are asked and answered and which would be the focus for the

evening session. The second was a set of amendments that didn't count strictly as consolidation but were vital for the inauguration of the next synod in November and so needed to be done before the consolidation was voted on. As a result, the Chair of the Standing Orders Committee, alerted Synod to the prospect of three separate visits to the platform over the weekend. All were in due course satisfactorily passed.

Another complicated connection was also resolved before the possible excitement of Question time.

Changes to the regulations for administration of Holy Communion were required to permit in certain circumstances the distribution to be performed by children. These also included changes that would allow for incumbents to have greater licence to appoint lay administrators. Before this regulation change could be made, there needed to be a small change to Canon B12 to permit delegation to the incumbent. Amending Canon C35 achieved this by replacing 5 words with 3. Sterling stuff!!

We had a very good presentation by the Ethical Investment Advisory Group (EIAG) and the National Investing Bodies (NIBs). This was focused predominantly on [policies](#) proposed by the EIAG and the decisions being made by the NIBs, particularly around investment in Fossil Fuels - a hot topic (sic).

And so to questions!

In February, in an attempt to speed up the question answering it had been decided to issue written answers to all questions to everyone and not to read out the answer before waiting for supplementaries. However, the standing orders had not prevented a rather mechanical presentation which referred each time to the answer printed out. This time, with the standing orders changed, the question number only needed to be read out and then supplementary questions could be asked immediately. This should have meant a quicker passage through the whole set of questions. Well? Not exactly! It would have helped had it not been for some extremely longwinded answers to the supplementaries.

During the giving of answers it was clear that not all were satisfied by the answers given - in fact some thought that some of those questioned had been evasive or abrupt which led to many after hours mutterings. Fortunately, some of those who stood accused, Archbishop Justin and the Bishop of Truro, were gracious enough to apologise on the following day, which helped enormously to diffuse tensions.

The lesson to be learned is to ensure that the supplementaries are clearly stated and that those who answer are able to be brief but not curt.

### **Saturday 11<sup>th</sup>**

The usual pattern for York has been to have Group Work on the Saturday morning on one of the great affairs that we might be discussing later. This year, this was going to be pitched into Monday as preparation for the whole day being spent on issues relating to Climate Change.

The morning was taken up entirely with legislative business that needed to be completed before the end of the quinquennium. Some things were quite urgent and others, because of the length of time it takes for things to progress to this stage, would be tricky to resolve quickly in the next quinquennium as it would mean a delay into the new year in some cases.

First up was the Draft Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure together with its associated Amending Canon and the petition to the Queen. These have been carefully picked over in the past and were up for final drafting and final approval. Everything went through smoothly but during the

debates some concerns were expressed that resourcing might not be sufficient. This concern was returned to in the budget debate on Sunday evening.

Next, we had the drafting and approval of the Draft Diocesan Stipends Fund (Amendment) Measure. This was about the ability to use funds on a total return basis. This went through smoothly.

The Draft Ecclesiastical Offices (Terms of Service) (Amendment) Regulations 2015 was the first fruits of the Simplification Workstream of the Reform and Renewal Programme. It proposed changes to enable people to be put into posts on a time limited basis where there was a clear pastoral need to fill the post while a more permanent solution was being discerned. It also allowed for some changes to medical certificate requirements for Self-Supporting Ministers. These were passed.

Faculty Jurisdiction enables the church to avoid some of the excesses of local planning laws. The 2015 Rules came up for consideration and were passed with some amendments. The most amusing speech listed, as the three major blockers to church growth, "Blocked Gutters, Bats and the Victorian Society".

We had a short break after lunch from the rest of the legislative trawl to have a Private Members Motion from Simon Killwick who wanted to promote the usefulness of the report from the FAOC (Faith & Order Commission) on *Senior Church Leadership: A Resource for Reflection*. This was clearly a coded attempt to enable debate on the report and also the *Discerning & Nurturing Senior Church Leaders* report (the so called Green Report) which had caused unrest earlier by not being up for debate. The debate was very good and helped to smooth some otherwise ruffled feathers.

Back into the legislative melee with a proposal which allows PCCs to deal with some Property transactions subject to certain monetary limits without the need for Diocesan Approval.

An arcane bit of business relating to the display of voting results under STV (Single Transferable Vote) regulations was passed without much ado. This was followed by the second foray by the Chair of the Standing Orders Committee (see previous comment).

Every now and then a report comes to Synod which attempts to make or at least report on, progress of the world's christian denominations to move closer together. The current offering is a very good report from the World Council of Churches' Commission on Faith and Order entitled *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*.

I confess that I overreacted when I read the response to this report produced by our own CCU (Council for Christian Unity) and FAOC. Their response contained more theological jargon than I can cope with and others also felt the same. The motion before us asked us to "commend the text for consideration at every level of the Church of England". My view was that this should be resisted as it would divert activity in the parishes from what I felt was more profitable in terms of reform and renewal.

Although an amendment to this effect was defeated, an apology was graciously made to the effect that the CCU response had been written inaccessibly in part. Subsequent conversations with the Bishop of Peterborough and others secured the idea that any study material will actually be written in English.

Lunchtime had seen meetings of the standing committees of the House of Laity and the two Convocations. These meetings had to discern whether the respective houses were comfortable with the latest versions of the Holy Communion Regulations (see Friday) and Accessible Language Texts for Holy Baptism (debated at a previous group of sessions). If they had decided they were not then the evening would have resulted in meetings to discuss them further. Fortunately, they

were comfortable and so the planned evening schedule, looking at the annual reports of the Church Commissioners and the Archbishops' Council, was taken.

After business was over the Synod members allowed themselves time off to celebrate the end of the quinquennium with a revue starring various members. The acts included some brilliant entries and I was pleased to have been able to organise six members of the Archbishops' Council to perform the Dead Pan Cinderella. No-one who saw the Archbishop of York as Prince Charming will ever forget it!

## **Sunday 12<sup>th</sup>**

The Minster hosted the Synod members for Eucharist and we were treated to a great sermon from the Archbishop of Canterbury. The text is available [here](#). In it he speaks of the fear that causes us to retreat from doing anything and contrasts it with the salvation through Christ which enables us to become the prophets that God calls us to be.

The rest of the day fell into distinct chunks.

Strangely, one of these related to some liturgical matters and was split into two by the third visit to the platform by the Chair of the Standing Orders Committee whose job at this point was, finally, to persuade us to approve the shiny new consolidated Standing Orders. He did.

We have spent some time in previous groups of sessions looking at more accessible language for use in baptism and the regulations for who can administer holy communion. These had been the subject of Saturday's meetings of the Standing Committees of the House of Laity and the Convocations. As none had claimed a reference, it was clear that these would pass but the process had to be completed.

One of the first debates that Philip Giddings had spoken in, 30 years ago, was a Private Members Motion (PMM) which encouraged the synod to have at least one PMM and one Diocesan Synod Motion (DSM) in each group of sessions. His success then has led to many fruitful debates and today's treat was timely. The old Diocese of Wakefield (now part of the Diocese of Leeds (aka West Yorkshire and the Dales)) had introduced a debate on the Nature and Structure of the Church.

The motion called for a national debate on the organisational shape of the church that would best equip parishes for service. However, with the launch in February of the Reform and Renewal Programme, although this debate was timely, there was a sense in which it was better to air some views but not commit much time to the debate as the elements that were likely to arise were already going to be part of the ongoing programme.

The enthusiastic Bishop of Chelmsford introduced a presentation by members of the Committee for Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns. There is a significant issue relating to the relative lack of senior and other church leaders from this section of our community being visible in Synods, Committees, Boards and Councils. He said frequently we prayed for things to change but actually that wasn't enough. He said that in his courses on prayer he would exhort people to "stop praying" for things ... unless "you are prepared to do something about it!". There was a brilliant video that was shown illustrating the point and promotes the hashtag #itooamCofE. The video is to be found [here](#).

The even more enthusiastic Dr Paula Gooder helped us to prepare for the two Climate Change debates, scheduled for Monday, by giving us a brilliant insight into the words used to describe the nature of humanity's role in terms of the environment. She focussed on the words "subdue" and "dominion" in Genesis 1 26-28 and challenged us to consider whether these words gave humanity

the right to do whatever it liked to the environment or whether that view needed to be modified. She invited us to study further in the study groups on the following morning.

The evening was initially spent debating the apportionment of the Archbishops' Council's expenditure in 2016 between the five areas (Training for the Ministry, National Support, Grants & Provisions, Mission Agencies' Clergy Pension Contributions & the CHARM Scheme (Clergy Retirement Housing)) and further what would be required from each Diocese to support this expenditure. The total budget for 2016 will amount to just in excess of £32 million.

The final event was another presentation about the emerging plans from the National Society (Church of England's Education Division) on the Development of Teaching and Educational Leadership Partnerships. The Vice Chancellor of the University of Winchester, Professor Joy Carter, gave a very polished and enthusiastic presentation, boxing and coxing with Nigel Genders - our Director of Education. This is a tremendous opportunity to ensure that well qualified christian teachers can be available and continue the church's position as one of the primary forces for education in our country.

### **Monday 13<sup>th</sup>**

The two debates on Monday were preceded by Group Study of the materials introduced the previous evening. We met in different parts of the campus and in groups of about 20 discussed the issues after having a short time of worship. Although no outcomes were to be fed back to the organisers of the debates, most people I spoke to felt that it was a valuable time and that we were able to participate better in the following debates.

The morning was spent in debating a motion which encouraged a basketful of actions which included calling on those attending the Paris Climate Summit in November/December to agree long term pathways to a low carbon future. The afternoon was used to debate our response to the issue of Climate Change relating to how we, through our NIBs, invest or otherwise seek to influence companies and policy makers. Someone asked when was the right time to disinvest from companies rather than engage with them in an attempt to change their culture. The blunt answer was "when they stop listening!".

In the morning's debate one thought worth pursuing was to encourage people to contemplate fasting on the first day of every month.

Over the weekend there had been the opportunity to say farewell to a number of people. In particular a, sadly much delayed, farewell to Bishop Michael Perham who is now living in Bath & Wells Diocese. The Bishop of Lichfield, Jonathan Gledhill, was also present to be given a send off.

Normally very few Lay or Clergy get a mention but it sometimes happens. This group of sessions sees the final attendance of the dynamic duo who symbolised the Women Bishops discussions. It was wonderful to see Christina Rees CBE and Prebendary David Houlding getting a special mention.

Also, as I have already mentioned, we were losing Dr Philip Giddings and also one of the Prolocutors, Archdeacon Christine Hardman. So good to see their particular contribution honoured in this way.

After a Eucharist we were prorogued.

It has been a rollercoaster of a quinquennium in which we reached the depths in November 2012 only to be raised up in 2014. Some members know that they are not returning and others will wait to see what the electorate decide. So as we leave the campus it is a question hanging in the air - "Farewell ... or Au Revoir".

**Tim Hind**

## Bath & Wells