

Open Synod Group Newsletter Autumn 2015

President

Right Rev Trevor Willmott. Bishop of Dover

Anne Martin. Chair from July 2015

General Synod 2015 Elections

This year sees the quinquennial elections of the Houses of Clergy and Laity. The high drama and historical admittance of women to the episcopate is done. Now for the programme of renewal and reform which will challenge the whole church with its focus upon effective mission, leadership, re-imagining ministry, reform of ministerial education, discipleship and simplification of procedures. So this newsletter looks back and forward with the issue of human sexuality waiting in the wings.

NEW MEMBERS

OSG are planning to hold a lunch on Wednesday November 25th for new members to meet the representatives of General Synod Interest Groups.

Information to follow

The Newsletter Editor sought individual reflections on the work and life of GS, here they are:

The end of an era? Caroline Spencer, Chair of OSG to 2015

The General Synod 2010-2015 is no more. How did we feel as we stood to hear ourselves dissolved? After all, we had Made History: we were the Synod which lived the roller-coaster ride and eventually passed the legislation enabling women to be bishops, and Rachel Treweek took her seat as Bishop of Gloucester on our watch. This single issue dominated our time, but it was not the only thing we did. Adding what we did this time to the list in GS Misc 1111, we concluded 88 pieces of legislative and 55 pieces of non-legislative business. We have read mountains of papers, written stacks more speeches than we've given, listened to umpteen debates and voted hundreds of times. We've served on committees and working groups, scrutinised the budget and sat at the feet of household names. We've learnt a huge amount about the workings of our Church and our world. We've worshipped together in a whole variety of ways, made friends and enjoyed both fascinating conversations and scurrilous gossip in the tea room. We've been part of it and it's been amazing. What a privilege! and now it's over. Some will return in November, but lots of us won't. I won't. After 20 years, it's time for me to stop. I was first elected in 1995, the year after the first women became priests, and I am leaving in the year that the first women were consecrated bishops. It does seem the end of an era and heralds the start of another. There's plenty more work for the next General Synod to do: Reform and Renewal may well prove to be the springboard to a transformed Church of England. That certainly would be my hope, and I will be praying for those who will be elected to take that work forward.

OSG Committee wish to thank Caroline for all her hard work, good humour and dedication to the committee and the Group and wish her well in her retirement. Our grateful thanks also to Tony Berry who has competently edited the newsletters and Stephen Barney who has faithfully kept the membership list.

Christina Rees; member of Archbishops' Council; ex Chair of Watch and St Alban's diocese

This has been a quinquennium of extremes, from the crash and burn of the women bishops' legislation in 2012, and the resulting widespread outrage, to the remarkable positive changes brought about by the facilitated discussions, which produced the success of a new and better women bishops measure only 18 months later. Energy in General Synod is up, but so is some wariness about the focus on the Reform & Renewal programme and an underlying sense of foreboding about the future debates on sexuality. For me, the last five years have been the most distressing and the most encouraging. I leave with a sense of completion and peace.

Anne Martin Chair of OSG 2015 -

My lasting impression of the last five years is how the working atmosphere has changed in General Synod since the 2010 elections. Respect and courtesy between members has grown since the fall out from the distrust and anger leading up to and resulting from the failed vote on Women Bishops in November 2012. Group work and facilitated conversations has led to a greater working together and a common wish from most to move forward for the good of the Church of England. In July 2013, after the facilitated discussions I was so grateful to two members who came from a completely different churchmanship to myself who supported me through the evening after a really difficult day. That for me showed how we should be as a broad, united church.

We have finally crossed a great hurdle with the appointment of women bishops. Smiles and fellowship have increased. In the July session, it was a delight to see that those who have previously opposed each other supporting each other in a debate. Anyone still present for the farewells will never forget the hug between Christina Rees and David Houlding; it summed up the better place we have reached.

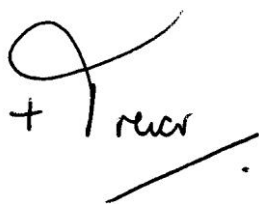
Bishop Trevor; President of OSG

The 2010 – 2015 Quinquennium will go down in history as one of the epoch-making times, not only in the life of the church but also in the wider community which we seek to serve. The decision to ordain women as bishops after a long period of study and not some inconsiderable pain has I believe refreshed the life of our church in ways which we are only just beginning to discover. Alongside that we have seen a renewed determination by the Church, not only to talk about the society around us but to engage more deeply in meeting its needs as well as its aspirations. These debates on social inclusion, the environment, the continuing search for worldwide peace, in my judgment bring out the best from General Synod. To listen to members speaking out of authentic experience and with deep wisdom always helps me to work through times when Synod becomes scratchy and ill at ease with itself.

In and through all of this OSG has been a place of hospitality and of bridge building across the varied, and at times, sharply held views of Synod.

2015-2020 now beckons. My prayer is for a Synod characterised evermore by a will to embrace diversity and to live more charitably together. I hope those standing will not be on a single ticket but will seek to reflect the rich and varied life of our Church as a whole.

It's been a joy and a privilege to serve the membership of OSG and I look forward to welcoming many new members later this year.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Trevor', with a plus sign to the left and a horizontal line underneath.

The OSG is not all hard work! John Freeman writes:

We hold a regular social event on the Saturday evening of the York Synod open to all members of Synod. Normally this is a quiz and on the last year of the Synod a topical review. At each of them we collect money for a charity that is in the news and have collected a total of £4370 that went to the following good causes:

2011 The Nasio Trust – £366 ; 2012 Friends of the Holy Land - £500 ; 2013 Christian Aid for Syria - £622 ; 2014 Christian Aid for Sudan - £1026 ; 2015 Melanesian Mission UK for cyclone relief in Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands - £1856

My personal highlight was introducing the private member's motion that obliged the Church of England to pay the Living Wage that has been overwhelmingly accepted.

Debrah McIsaac from Salisbury Diocese;

In November 2010, I was asked for my reflections as a newbie member of the House of Laity on my first sitting. At the end of the last sitting and the end of the quinquennium I find that some of my initial observations still hold true. I still find Standing Orders a bit of a mystery but I think I now have the hang of 'move to next business' and great respect for how John Freeman is able to read the mood of Synod and the chair of the debate before he says "Can I interest the chair in a motion for closure of this debate?"

Alongside many, many others I was deeply disappointed with the results of the vote on women in the episcopacy in November 2012. I think that most people now agree that the package that was approved is better and fairer legislation.

In the first piece that I wrote for this newsletter, I said that the opening Eucharist in Westminster Abbey had been splendid. One of the delights of being a member of General Synod is the annual worship in York Minster. What a privilege it is to worship with 600+ faithful from all parts of the church who know the tunes and the words! The quality of worship in the chamber has almost invariably been excellent. It was good to finish the Quinquennium in the way that we did. We seem to have become a more thoughtful, compassionate people when gathered together.

Going forward, General Synod and the House of Laity in particular will have to be alert to the possible consequences of changes proposed in order to streamline the procedures and processes or which offer financial savings. The Reform and Renewal agenda is to be welcomed but as the church has known from the beginning, true renewal comes only from God.

Tim Hind, Bath & Wells. Vice Chair of the House of Laity

It was the worst of times ... It was the best of times...

The last 5 years have been a roller coaster in many different ways. It has seen the Church of England at its worst and at its best. And the really good news is that it has ended on a high.

With the clear requirement that women must be permitted to be bishops it was a deeply difficult time for the church in November 2012 when the population at large and a goodly number of politicians were calling for a serious rethink regarding the way General Synod operated.

With hindsight (*I ought to be able to do that!*) this gloomiest moment has turned out to be a significant turning point in the way we do things without actually changing the way we could do things!

Although the Reform & Renewal activities and the Shared Conversations are now moving into the spotlight, I look to the future of the C of E with great hope that we can weather any big issues that come our way.

Tony Berry (Newsletter Editor and Chester Diocese) has some helpful advice for new members:

These reports are necessary background reading for all new members of General Synod:

Discerning and Nurturing Senior Leaders (GS 1982). .

Resourcing the Future (GS 1978).

Resourcing Ministerial Education (GS 1979).

Church Commissioners' Funds and Inter-Generational Equity (GS 1981).

Discipleship (GS 1977).

Simplification (GS 1980).

The material on Human Sexuality and the shared conversations.

They are all work in progress and they are all on the Church of England web site. A quick skim of the papers for the last four GS sessions (all on the web site with easy download) will provide a rich context for you new ministry. You will travel with our love and prayers, especially from those like me who, after 22 years of privileged service, have hung up their badges.

Prayer for General Synod;

Almighty Father, Give us grace and strength this day to build up your church in love for the world

In the making of disciples and to equip the saints for the work of ministry.

Plant your hope deep within us, Open our eyes to a fresh vision of your kingdom.

Give us wisdom for the common task.

Draw us and all your Church deeper into Christ, our foundation and cornerstone, that we may work together as one body in the power of the Spirit and for the sake of your glory. Amen.

OSG Officers & Committee Members

Mrs Anne Martin, Guildford (Chair)

Mrs Penny Allen, Lichfield (Vice Chair)

Mrs Debbie Mclsaac, (Secretary)

Mr John Freeman, Chester (Treasurer)

Mr Stephen Barney, Leicester (Current Membership Secretary)

Professor Tony Berry, Chester (Current Newsletter Editor)

Robin Back, Norwich (Webmaster)

OSG NEWSLETTER EDITOR (to 2015) TONY BERRY

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