

OPEN SYNOD GROUP

NEWSLETTER

Summer 2012



WARMEST CONGRATULATIONS TO
RT REVD RICHARD ATKINSON
A LONG-STANDING MEMBER OF THE OSG COMMITTEE
ON HIS APPOINTMENT AS BISHOP OF BEDFORD

LIVING IN THE BETWEEN TIMES

A year ago we were all in the thick of it. Debates on the Measure at Deanery and Diocesan Synods; the Code of Practice Working Group wrestling with some of the thornier issues; lots of conversations at every level of church life. By the early autumn it was clear that the Measure was receiving overwhelming support up and down the land and those who have been working and praying for the full inclusion of women in all orders of ministry were feeling positive about the future.

Then we came to the General Synod debates at the February group of Sessions. Synod gave a cautious welcome to the illustrative Code of Practice, and (more importantly) held firm to the Measure as sent out to the dioceses, asking the House of Bishops not to amend the Measure 'significantly'. But it became abundantly clear that quite a few Synod members (especially in the House of Laity) still do not believe that this Measure will do - while many others feel that the deal has been very carefully worked and that any change in the Measure to help the minority would undermine the consensus so clearly displayed in the dioceses.

I am writing this in the week before the House of Bishops meets to decide what to do. We all need to be praying for them, for a huge outpouring of the Holy Spirit to make clear to them the way forward. Is it possible to find a tiny adjustment to the language which would provide adequately for those opposed to the legislation while not undermining the carefully crafted balance of the Measure? We wait anxiously to see what emerges, and then to prepare for the debates in July.

Waiting is always hard; much harder than the all-absorbing work of a year ago. Let us use the time to pray as earnestly as we can manage in the coming weeks for a clear outcome in July. My prayer of course is that the Measure will come back unamended and the Synod will embrace it wholeheartedly, so that we can open the doors of the episcopate to women. But whatever happens the fall-out will be painful. I pray too that all Synod members will care for each other through the debates in July and beyond.

Caroline Spencer, Canterbury
OSG Chair and member of the legislation steering committee

DIVERSITY OR DIVISION?

Throughout the 37 years that I have been a Christian I have known of many disagreements between different groups within the church. I have heard debates on whether Christians should shop on Sundays; go to pubs; allow their children to read books about witches or go to Halloween parties; remarry after divorce. On all these issues and many more Christians have disagreed, yet been able to stay together as one body in the church.

Not any longer. Now the question of how we decide who can be a Bishop is threatening to split the church in two.

Obviously not everyone who wants to be a Bishop can be, but how do we choose who can and who cannot? That is the one issue on which we cannot agree to differ.

So in the name of diversity and inclusion we are in danger of creating a uniform church which excludes those who disagree on this one issue.

We have debated long on this in Synod, and we all know all the arguments put by those of our own persuasion and those of the other, so I will not repeat them here.

At the time of writing the House of Bishops has not yet met, and we don't know exactly what the legislation we will be asked to vote on in July will contain. However, those who cannot accept women as Bishops will need there to be changes to what we have seen previously if they are to be able to stay in the church.

This is no threat by old fashioned bigots who want to keep the church in the dark ages, but a plea from people who are willing to see something they don't agree with happen for the sake of those with whom they disagree, as long as it doesn't create a situation in which their consciences would cause them to have to leave the church they love.

Conservative evangelicals find it difficult to see how the House of Bishops can maintain a supply of Bishops to minister to parishes of our integrity (as they seek to reassure us in the illustrative code of practice), as there are few Bishops who do not ordain women, and no evangelical Diocesan Bishop who does not.

This situation will only worsen (from our point of view) as fewer from our integrity will offer for ordination if they do not feel confident that they will only be asked to serve under a male bishop.

We do not want to leave the Church of England. In fact we will do everything in our power to stay. However, we would be hypocrites if we were willing to come under the authority of women Bishops, when we believe that this goes against what God has decreed for His church.

Alison Wynne, Blackburn



ONE MORE STEP ALONG THE ROAD WE GO

It's a November session of the General Synod and the Motion under debate is:

'That this Synod asks the Standing Committee to prepare and bring forward legislation to remove the barriers to the ordination of women to the priesthood and their consecration to the episcopate'. After six and a half hours, the Motion gains an overall majority, but fails to gain the required two-thirds majority in each House, and so falls. Extraordinarily, that debate took place 34 years ago! It seems hard to believe that only now will General Synod once again be voting on the final approval of opening the episcopate to women.

The situation has, of course, changed considerably in the intervening years. Women have been ordained as deacons since 1987 and as priests since 1994, with over 5,000 women having been ordained as priests. Currently nearly a third of all active clergy in the Church of England are female and that figure is likely to rise, as roughly equal numbers of men and women continue to be selected for ordination training. This November marks the 20th anniversary of the vote to allow women's ordination to the priesthood.

Last year 42 out of 44 dioceses voted to accept the draft Bishops and Priests (Consecration and Ordination of Women) Measure, which was commended in February to proceed to Final Approval. Also in February, a Diocesan Synod Motion from Southwark Diocese calling for the House of Bishops *not* to exercise its power to amend the draft Measure was passed. The Southwark motion was slightly amended, which asked the House of Bishops not to amend the draft Measure 'substantially'.

The draft Measure will be debated in July unless the House of Bishops decides to introduce any amendments that are deemed to be 'substantial'. That judgement will be made by a group consisting of the two Archbishops, the Prolocutors of Canterbury and York, and the Chair and Vice Chair of the House of Laity.

By the time this is published, those decisions will have been made. If the debate goes ahead, I very much hope Synod will hold faith with the dioceses and the wider Church, and vote overwhelmingly in favour of at last opening

the episcopate to women. I also hope that those who do not themselves want women to be bishops will at least abstain, for the sake of the Church's mission. To pass the Measure would have a most positive impact on how the Church relates to the people it exists to serve. This would be the best news to come from the Church of England for a long time and would communicate more powerfully than words ever could that Christ's saving, liberating and transforming love is for all.

Christina Rees, St Albans

A DIOCESAN-EYE VIEW

Along with much of the church, as I move towards the end of my sixth decade, it feels as if I've been both debating the theory and experiencing the fact of women in ministry for all of my adult life - because in fact, I have. My first serious Bible study group, in the 1960s, was led by a female vicar's secretary who knew just when to encourage the shy and restrain the arrogant teenagers that we were. Then came formative years in the early 1970s, where it seemed simply axiomatic that the university Christian Union had a 'lady vice-president' to attend to the particular needs of women - who all studied in women-only colleges of course. My own conversion to the cause of women's ordination came in the early 80s, as I began to attend more seriously to the balance of biblical and social argument.

Eventually in 1993 came the vote for women priests, taking everybody by surprise as it seemed, supporters and opponents alike! I well recall the Chapter meeting in north London only days after the key vote, where our substantial Anglo-Catholic bloc seemed in total shock at the end of the priestly world as both they and the rest of us had previously known it. It was the last I was to see of some of them. In early summer 1994 our curate was one of the first women to be ordained priest in the 'natural scheme of things', and in our own parish church in Homerton too - rather than as part of the celebratory Cathedral ordinations of earlier that year.

In the 20 years since then I've seen women's ordained ministry move from exceptional to normal and (in the best sense of the word) ordinary

for all those parts of the church where it's been accepted; and alongside that the development of the 'mixed economy' of parishes where it hasn't been, and of Bishops who don't. Those who didn't leave got used to the new church, as did we all.

So what do I make of the current proposals for women bishops and their likely passage into law? After all this time, I want to say "about time too" - but also to welcome the fact that provision for difference of view will remain, as also a matter of principle. And I think quite a lot of ordinary church members will do so too.

Looking forwards, what are we expecting in July? A worst case scenario now on all sides would be for the current legislation to fail to reach the required majorities. I know many of those opposed feel the same way too - and political reality has led them hitherto to hold out for every adaptation and amendment possible. But what comes to Synod in July will be pretty much the deal now on offer. I find it hard to imagine it being voted down because there isn't another deal, now on offer. I suppose another worst case would be for Parliament, in a fit of secular muscle flexing, to seek to make mischief with whatever provisions the church has at length arrived at.

Attention therefore passes to what the Code will look like as it heads towards its approvable form - and therefore to what Synod members want the House of Bishops to hear as it finalizes that document. What this no-longer Synod member wants them to hear is that it must create as much room as possible for parishes to get on with the real work of the church - proclaiming the gospel and tending the faithful. There must be room for changes of mind, but no assumption that minds necessarily will change. And it seems to me that it would be good for all involved firstly in its final drafting, and then later in its application, to remember that neither the offering nor the reception of any form of ministry is a human right. It's a divine gift, and a means of grace. I hope we can keep our practice of it true to that vision.

Rev Pete Hobson

Member of General Synod 2005 to 2010



EDITORIAL: LOOKING FORWARD AND OUTWARD

At the OSG Committee meeting in February, it was reckoned to be a good idea to provide a range of views on 'where we are with the women bishops' legislation.' I am very grateful to those who have provided food for thought and hope this range of views will be kept in mind, along with the House of Bishop's amendments, when we come to vote in July.

Brief items by Stephen Barney and Robin Back continues our introductions to committee members. We hope to have a profile of our new bishop soon.

We don't, however, want only to look inward so I am including an account of my recent visits to the Holy Land and to the Lutheran Church in Germany as my farewell contributions to the OSG Newsletter. I am delighted to report (though not a little daunted at the awesome task ahead) that I have been accepted for training for ordination and will commence an intensive course in September. Because of this, I have resigned as editor of the OSG Newsletter with immediate effect, and will be leaving General Synod after the February 2013 Group of Sessions. It is, however, too soon to give details of my successor, so I shall be happy to pass on anything members may wish to contribute to the next Newsletter.

Helen Leathard

EDITOR'S FOOTNOTE TO WOMEN BISHOPS ITEMS

As this newsletter was being finalised it was announced that the House of Bishops had made two amendments to the draft legislation: to clarify the meaning of 'delegation' and 'derivation' of episcopal authority and functioning and to require the Code of Practice to include guidance on the appointment of male bishops and priest to serve parishes that have submitted 'Letters of Request'. The 'group of six', having taken legal advice, determined that this had not altered the 'substance of the proposals embodied in the legislation which had already been approved last year by 42 of the Church of England's 44 dioceses'. The draft legislation will, therefore, come to General Synod in July.

OSG COMMITTEE MEMBERS**STEPHEN BARNEY**

Stephen Barney, membership secretary, a retired public company director, Reader and Cathedral canon, is a DBF Chairman (as opposed to a piece of furniture), Trustee of Launde Abbey and a founding director of St Martins House. I am thrilled to be able to make some contribution to the life of our church and to be involved with the Open Synod Group. My prayer is that we can continue to journey together with brothers and sisters who hold differing and, indeed sometimes, diametrically opposed views, expressing firstly what we share in Christ and then learning together. Having sat through some less than edifying debates on Women in the Episcopate in the last Synod, the quality of what happened in Westminster this February was very encouraging.

ROBIN BACK

I live in a small rural village called Guestwick in the middle of what is affectionately known as the Rub' al Khali (Empty quarter) of Norfolk. Our Church, St. Peter's, is of Saxon origin but reconstructed in the 15th Century and is now a favourite residence for several species of bat. As Churchwarden, in common with many others up and down the country, we grit our teeth and sweep up the mess before weekly services.

At General Synod I am therefore a regular follower of rural-oriented events - especially those which will save us money!

I also serve on our Diocesan Bishops Council and Board of Finance. Under the latter heading I have recently been appointed Director of two of our newly established trading subsidiaries to provide services to our schools and to install a county-wide broadband network using our own network of some 600 or so medieval Churches. This latter is a new project in 2011 and (in early 2012) is already beginning to spread more widely with assistance from local authorities.

I have gravitated towards *OSG* as a middle-of-the-road Christian family at *General Synod* which most closely reflects my own faith. I am very comfortable with *BCP* services enjoying the poetry and rhythm of the language as part of the distinctiveness of our church. I'm also quite happy to use other liturgies when occasion requires - especially when children are present although I believe that beyond a certain age, most children will become comfortable with *BCP*, even prefer it.

As a recent co-optee onto the *OSG* committee, I see my role as facilitating communications between members by enhancing the website to make this a tool for members of *OSG* as well as the wider world and by supporting our semi-annual newsletter.

CHRISTIANITY ABROAD

In the past two months I have had the amazing privilege and pleasure of both a pilgrimage to the Holy Land - the first in my life - and a visit to the Lutheran Church in Braunschweig, Germany. Both have enabled me to place my Christian faith in a broader context, valuing my Anglican heritage but yearning to move beyond denominational divisions. I hope this very personal selection of memories will inspire readers to look beyond internal *C of E* concerns.

The Holy Land visit included seven days in and around Jerusalem and three in Galilee. Space is sufficient only to describe some highlights and I will follow the biblical sequence rather than the order of our visit. So first, the baptismal site on the River Jordan: the site we visited near Jericho was recently re-opened with facilities for renewing baptismal vows. Most significantly, it is approached by a narrow road between fences that border the still-land-mined expanse of a militarised zone. The desolation of the surroundings, compared to the vibrancy and luxury of Jerusalem, made it easy to identify with John's solitary quest to promote repentance.

In Nazareth we visited a Greek Orthodox Church built over a spring where, it is believed, Mary was visited by the Archangel Gabriel. The morning liturgy was being sung as we moved about taking photographs and descending a stairway to see the spring, creating an amazingly spiritual and hospitable experience. This was in dramatic contrast to the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem where the powerful faith associations with the place were offset some-

what by the crowds and hurried procession through the most holy parts. A powerful sandstorm that blew up and clouded views across Manger Square was, however, a timely reminder of the changeable and challenging environment in which the Gospel emerged. We were challenged to think of Jesus' youth during a visit to the Roman city of Sepphoris. The word usually translated as carpenter to describe Joseph's occupation could equally mean artisan and, Nazareth being too small to provide a regular income, it seems likely that Joseph, with Jesus as apprentice, could have been employed in the construction of this nearby city, famed for its mosaics.

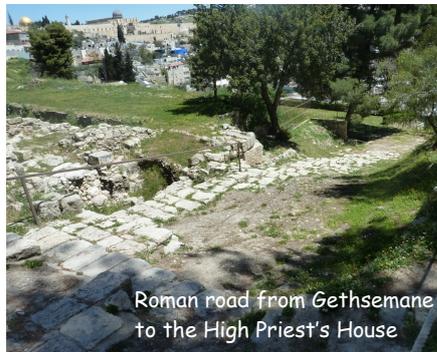
The excavated remains of first century Capernaum exerted a particularly powerful pull on my soul and I spent many minutes simply rooted to the spot contemplating Jesus' activities there, in the company of Peter's family, after he had been banished from Nazareth. The newly built church on



Ancient Capernaum with modern church

this site is actually suspended over the original synagogue to avoid damage in case of earthquake. A communion service on the shore of the lake, recalling the feeding of the five thousand, was profoundly moving and served as a timely reminder of the outdoor nature of much of Jesus' ministry - maybe we need to do more to follow that example.

Finally to Jerusalem and a day in which we journeyed from the Mount of Olives via the Garden of Gethsemane to the Church of St Peter in Galllicantu (meaning cockcrow), built over the site of the High Priest's residence. Ancient olive trees in Gethsemane have been confirmed as being over 2,000 years old, and the sense of Jesus having prayed among them was both distressing and strangely comforting. A Roman road from here to the High Priest's residence is almost certainly the route taken by Jesus and his captors on the night before his crucifixion; and the stone cell below the modern church is highly likely to be the place where Jesus was kept



Roman road from Gethsemane to the High Priest's House

between interrogations, and also where Peter and John were subsequently imprisoned for healing a paralysed man. All of these places evoked deep spiritual stirrings, and we were fortunate to visit them when they were sufficiently quiet for contemplative prayer - in marked contrast to the Via Dolorosa and Church of the Holy Sepulchre. A Sunday morning Eucharist at the Anglican Cathedral of St George, conducted in Arabic and English was a joyous occasion and firm reminder that the C of E is only a small part of a much greater whole.

The bilingual theme was revisited in Braunschweig Cathedral when Anglican Readers contributed to a special Communion service along with our Lektoren and Pradikanten counterparts. Reciprocal visits between our linked dioceses of Blackburn and Braunschweig have been happening for several years, and this year's Ascensontide visit culminated in what was a profoundly moving service: with hymns to familiar tunes sung in two languages simultaneously, bible readings in both languages, six mini-sermons on Jesus' 'I am' sayings from John's Gospel, in English and German alternately, comprising a unifying whole for those who could understand all. The Eucharistic president was Domprediger Joachim Hempel (approximately equivalent of Dean) who used part of Common Worship Order One (in English) within a Lutheran context.

During the visit we stayed at the 'Theological Centre' which provides short- and long-term residential accommodation ministerial training. Lektoren have one year part-time study before commencing their ministry of leading non-Eucharistic services using lightly-personalised sermons from authorised sources; typically leading one or two services per month. After five years as a Lektor they can undertake further study and formation to become Pradikanten and are, thereby, authorised to write their own sermons and administer the elements at Holy Communion. Generous hospitality, guided visits and study of Lutheran liturgy and liturgical singing made this a remarkable learning experience. An Ascension Day outdoor service accompanied by the cathedral brass band in a park called Richmond illustrated good practice in outdoor ministry.

Helen Leathard, Blackburn
OSG Newsletter Editor



Worship leaders in Braunschweig Cathedral

OSG INFORMATION

Membership of Open Synod Group gives you the opportunity to voice your opinions whatever they may be.

**See the accompanying flyer for details of our
Social Evening Quiz at the July Synod**

Come along and relax with a drink in good company after the Saturday evening session. As ever, our quizmaster is the erudite Dr Edmund Marshall. **No need to book in advance.**

Membership forms will again be available.



The OSG's editorial policy is that any views may be published in the magazine (provided that they are not libellous or in any other way offensive) but the Group does not necessarily agree with the opinions expressed, nor take responsibility for the accuracy of statements within the articles.

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