

Open Synod Group Newsletter June 2013

President

The Rt Revd John Packer, Bishop of Ripon & Leeds

Mrs Caroline Spencer, Canterbury (Chair)

Women Bishops; Healing or a renewal of a power struggle?

The House of Bishops statement GS1886 marks a decisive step forward. The vast majority of lay people in the church (well over two thirds majority) want the women bishops measure to pass quickly and eirenicly into law with "all orders of ministry open to all without reference to gender."

Whether the current membership of the House of Laity will respect the wishes of the laity remains to be seen.

It is clear that the House of Bishops has responded to voices who said that there must be a better way (than the provisions by delegation in the defeated measure which the vast majority supported). This better way is by grace and trust and less law. There is the possibility of a House of Bishops declaration or new Act of Synod to establish a

national framework for provision of requested and provided alternative Episcopal oversight; the House has promised to ensure that there will be appropriate Bishops for requested oversight. General Synod will have a day of "facilitated discussion" on the proposals. Doubtless various groups will be making statements about the proposals and possibly "briefing their supporters". It would help us all avoid going over old ground if these comments and briefing papers were made available to every member of GS as a contribution to transparency, openness and reconciliation.

Whatever the outcome, surely we should aim to maintain a broad but not unbounded church. And we must be inclusive of all our traditions, but that means inclusive everywhere in the church, in every province, diocese, deanery and parish; no place should either wish to or be able to exclude any ordained priest or licensed minister. Then we can work together for the sake of the Gospel.

Episcopally led , Synodically ...?

Tim Hind reflects;

It is often said that we are episcopally led but synodically governed. But what does that mean?

We do form a mechanism for legislative change and at the base of it we enact things that become the law of the land. However, I think our role is more subtle than that.

Our role as Synod is both legislative and opinion forming. We will debate things like women's ministry and liturgical change and by doing so change the practices of the church.

On the other hand we are invited to engage with the great social issues of the day and as a result have debated all aspects of life including drugs, trident, the national lottery and female genital mutilation.

The question that needs to be asked is whether it does any good.

The legislative stuff is necessary. The other stuff is vital but the trick is to ensure that it is heard where it matters.

Good relations between Synod staff and the organs of government are the key to ensuring that the mechanisms are in place to get our message across. This works but they will still ignore us from time to time.

So Synod Governance I would say is working. Synod Opinion Forming is still work in progress.

Synodical government; spotlight on Deanery laity.

Electing the House of Laity of General Synod.

The Elections Review group are to report. It seems that GS might have a choice between leave matters as they are; Create a new kind of electorate but who and how?; let all members on electoral rolls have a vote. The latter two would mean creating a new constituency base, for the diocesan synods as well. These ideas need careful consideration to avoid the unintended consequences that always seems to follow rushed legislation. It would be useful and necessary to consult widely with laity before making any change.

Synodical Government; spotlight on the Diocese?

The continuing drama around Women Bishops has highlighted the fact that while the vast majority of Diocesan Synods voted for the legislation (and by two thirds majorities) the General Synod House of Laity could not quite get the two thirds majority required.

So were the Diocesan Synods unrepresentative of laity? And by implication is the system of Synodical Governance at the Diocesan level working as well and constructively as intended?

From research (OK... casual empiricism) it appears that dioceses have somewhat different practices; e.g. some encourage Deaneries to bring proposals to DS while others seem to discourage them. Some have private members motions on agendas, while others almost never do. Some keep the Board of Finance as a separate body while others make it up from the members of the Bishops' Council.

Interestingly the Diocese Commission proposals on the west Yorkshire dioceses said that its proposals were based on the mission needs of the church; but were Diocesan Mission plans critiqued on the basis of an established understanding of the relationship of mission to diocesan structures?

Perhaps it has become timely to find ways for Diocesan Synods to share good practice.

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