

## **GENERAL SYNOD REPORT – FEBRUARY 2012**

### **Monday 6th February**

My reports of Synod are always personal. Before I became Vice-Chair there were many opportunities for time out during the session to pause for breath. During this session, I found myself chair bound for all but one session. It was a really important week given that most of Wednesday and some of Tuesday and Thursday were taken up with various Women Bishops matters.

Monday was spent mostly on some nuts and bolts type stuff – Loyal Address, Progress of Measures and Statutory Instruments, Agenda Debate & Dates of future sessions and the Appointments to the Archbishops' Council. The highlight of the day was a very thought provoking debate led by Sarah Finch on Assisted Dying.

Whether you agree or disagree on the rights and wrongs of the debate on assisted dying itself, this was a debate on whether the church had an opinion on the recent outcome from the Commission on Assisted Dying run by Lord Falconer. The Commission was clearly set up by a group (Dignity in Dying (formerly the Voluntary Euthanasia Society)) which had a specific bias in favour of Assisted Dying and as such was looking for justification through appropriate means for a mechanism which would allow for it. Synod decided that it wished to express the view that the Commission was not sufficiently independent to be able to develop proposals which would protect vulnerable and disabled people.

So far as the Archbishops' Council is concerned it was brilliant to see Rebecca Swinson appointed. She has already a long relationship with General Synod having served as Chair of Church of England Youth Council and represented it on General Synod in her own right. The Archbishop of York said that Synod was probably in her DNA as her mother, Maggie, has been a long-serving member of Synod as well. The evening finished with Questions which had some lively exchanges.

### **Tuesday 7th February**

The morning worship was from the Book of Common Prayer (see below).

The joy of Parochial Fees occupied us at the start of the day. The Measure had been passed a while ago but the first attempt at getting a Fees Order approved fell last July. There was a need for the Archbishops' Council to reconsider some of the principles of what was "in" or "out" of the basic schedule. The revised order was broadly considered acceptable but that didn't stop a considerable number of challenges. The total value to the church of the challenges was quite large – as much as +£3.2m added to receipts or -£7.5m removed. In the end Synod resisted all those that would have cost us money and only one of the ones which would have increased income.

The basis for the Order is a realistic value assigned by a formula which represents the cost to the church of the provision of the various services. The major changes that went through were to allow for a fee payable to the PCC for the issue of a Certificate of Banns of Marriage (+£0.7m) and a fee payable to the PCC for a Burial (+£2.2m). The main concern for me is that the value of these fees needs to be bound into the process with some good solid rationale so that increases in future years can be calculated on a defensible basis.

There were further legislative debates and in the usual fashion where these were unfinished in the morning they were to be concluded in a slot later in the day. There was a debate on some changes to the Clergy Discipline Measure and changes to allow the Diocese in Europe to operate in the same way as "mainland" Dioceses. The afternoon was shorter than normal and consisted of two presentations, the continuation of legislative business from the morning and one other debate. The first

of these explained the content of the illustrative Code of Practice that would be published alongside of the Women Bishops Measure. The principle thrust of the presentation was that the content had to be entirely consistent with the Measure and so until such time as the legislation is passed it is not possible to finalise it. Many interesting points came up and in particular a lot of focus was put onto paragraph 20. This paragraph reads “Thirdly, the Measure requires that the episcopal ministry exercised under a diocesan scheme be exercised by delegation from the diocesan bishop. That delegation is not, however, the basis of the episcopal character of the acts of the bishop exercising episcopal ministry by delegation: that is derived from his episcopal orders, conferred at his ordination and consecration as a bishop in the Church. Rather, delegation can be seen as giving the bishop exercising episcopal ministry by delegation the permission for him lawfully to act as a bishop in a particular context – in this case, that of the arrangements under a diocesan scheme.” The Archbishops are working very hard to “square the circle” of differences between the majority of synod members who support the consecration of women and the minority (mainly Catholics and Conservative Evangelicals) who do not. This contrast between “derivation” and “delegation” will be the subject of continuing debate up to the July Synod in York. In a wonderful moment of self-effacement, the Archbishop of Canterbury said that he would try to explain these concepts – but given that it was him doing it, people might end up more confused.

After we had completed the unfinished business from the morning, we debated the idea of allowing for un-priested Archdeacons. This debate was quite lively but resulted in one the heaviest ever defeats of any Diocesan Synod motion in all three houses.

The final presentation was about the Anglican Alliance for Relief, Development and Advocacy which is designed to help local church initiatives by sharing skills and capabilities of the worldwide church. This was the one session I missed but more can be discovered at [www.anglicanalliance.org](http://www.anglicanalliance.org) or by contacting the administrator Rachel Mallows.

In the evening there was a service of reconciliation in Westminster Abbey. In 1662 a number of people were ejected from the church for refusing to conform to the Book of Common Prayer. The Act of Uniformity prescribed that any minister who refused by St. Bartholomew's Day 1662 should be ejected from the Church of England. This act meant about 2000 puritans left the Church of England. Non-conformism is embodied in the United Reformed Church which has its roots in Presbyterianism and Congregationalism. This joint act of witness to “reconcile” the two churches on the 350th Anniversary of the Great Ejection was a very moving service.

### **Wednesday 8th February**

The Archdeacon motion was supposed to have been this morning but it was moved to make way for an emergency debate on the recent violence in Nigeria. The new Bishop of Durham has been closely involved with support for Christians in Nigeria and proposed the motion to urge HM Government to do its utmost to support those who are attempting to provide protection for all Religious minorities in that country. The rest of the morning was taken up with the debate on the report back from the Dioceses on the Article 8 references on Women Bishops. As can be imagined there was a lot of statement of statistics and refutation that statistics demonstrated the true state of support. There were many speeches which should have been reserved for the afternoon but I suspect that the chairman knew that there would be pressure on the afternoon's debate that would be relieved if some of these things were said. It was a good tempered which was the opportunity for some to say that we need to be careful of the almost 25% who voted against whilst others were saying that we had

asked the Dioceses for their opinions and would be misunderstood if we then chose to ignore them.

The afternoon's debate had a more focused edge to it. During the reference to the Dioceses there was the opportunity for Dioceses to propose following motions. A motion concerning the "Archbishops' Amendment" was proposed in 10 out of 44 Dioceses and was carried in 6 of them (including Manchester). Other motions calling on the House of Bishops to amend the legislation so as to confer ordinary jurisdiction on bishops was proposed in 32 Dioceses and was carried in 5. A motion calling on the General Synod to request the House of Bishops not to exercise its power under Standing Order 60(b) to amend the draft Measure was carried in one Diocese (Southwark).

The Manchester and the Southwark motions were taken as the polarised positions (and were valid following motions) and so we debated them to test the mind of Synod. The purpose of the debate was to give a steer to the House of Bishops when they meet in May as to how extensive they might need to be in any amendments to the legislation. Neither of the possible outcomes would bind the House of Bishops but they would feel a certain amount of pressure should the results of the debate be particularly clear cut.

The first challenge came in the form of an amendment to the Southwark motion to change it to say "request the House of Bishops in the exercise its power under Standing Order 60(b) not to amend the draft Measure substantially". This was passed.

During the debate I caused a little stir by using the word discrimination to which one member very forcefully objected. I have spoken with him since and had some correspondence with a couple of others who were also upset. It is very easy to use words that can irritate people and I have said to all who have contacted me that I had no intention to offend.

There are a lot of hardworking members of synod of all persuasions who are attempting to maintain the maximum degree of unity. Sadly it is not true of all and in particular those who have used their official communications to talk about "so-called Lady Bishops" or in reference to the TEC primate "proprietor Mrs K J Schori". These phrases have been especially awkward. I ask for those with influence to help out by ensuring that the rest of the debate from now on is marked with decorum on all sides.

After a good debate the Southwark motion as amended was successful and so the steer to the House of Bishops is to do as little as they can to change the Measure when they meet in May. After they have met in May, the "Group of Six" will meet to determine whether the legislation has changed in substance from that which was referred under Article 8 and if they believe it has the Measure put to Synod in July would have to be re-referred to the Dioceses. No pressure there then!

The final debate on Wednesday was to change Standing Orders to allow for the Chair of the Business Committee to be elected by and from the whole Synod.

### **Thursday 9th February**

Everyone was somewhat subdued on Thursday morning after the marathon debates of the previous day. We had a good debate on the form of words for Eucharistic Prayers to be used when children are present and it was interesting that there was a plea for these to be useable in other contexts.

The Women Bishops legislation is sufficiently far advanced that some final drafting can be done and so we spent some time on that. Following on from that we had a very good presentation on the changes that are being proposed for Higher Education

Funding and what the Church of England's response to this might be in terms of Curriculum and Providers.

The final two debates were both about reform. The first concerned the way in which we should engage with the reform of the House of Lords. It invited the group that is looking at the matter on behalf of the Church of England to report back in February 2013.

The final debate was a very interesting debate look at the reform of the NHS and the provision of Healthcare within a Christian context and as part of our mission. There was a strong affirmation of the role of chaplains. As part of the debate I found myself agreeing with Chris Sugden. There's a first.

At the end of the day we were given a wonderful history lesson by Archbishop Rowan as we bade farewell to the Bishop of Chichester. In his eulogy he looked at all of John's predecessors and then compared them to him. Only one was singled out as being a complete opposite. He had denounced the Archbishop of Canterbury. The icons were George Bell and St Richard. This was a fitting tribute to a Bishop who I, personally, will miss immensely.

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