

## General Synod

February 8<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> 2018

Church House, Westminster

Synod ran from Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> to Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> February 2018, a new timing to try to make things less demanding for those members who are working. Listening to comments in the tea room it seemed to me that having part of the meeting on a Saturday, and not ending till 4.00pm, actually made things more difficult for the clergy – all of whom by definition are still working.

There were three Archbishops from the Anglican Communion in attendance: Thabo from Cape Town, S Africa, Winston from Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia, and Humphrey from Peshawa, Pakistan, all three of whom addressed us most movingly on Friday morning.

**The Report of The Business Committee** began the proceedings, when we could ask questions about what was and was not on the agenda. The usual request is for more debate and less presentation; exacerbated this time by the huge amount of reading – two lengthy reports on the Bishop Ball case and the Bishop Bell review; a long report on the Theological Review of the Crown Nominations Commission; the whole of the Cathedrals Working Group Report; together with the Church Property Measure, the document on Mission and Ministry in Covenant, a ‘Note’ from the Faith and Order Commission; and the Church of England Pensions Measure – 500 pages in total. And there were the rest of the papers on other items on the Agenda as well; indeed the Agenda itself is 21 pages long.

Thursday ended with **Questions**, which are sent in advance, and almost all of which receive a short written reply in the list we are given. The skill with asking questions however is in the supplementaries which can open up all sorts of additional areas of concern. They can also alert a careful listener to matters which are coming to the boil in different areas, so can give an interesting idea about future business. There were 20 on Safeguarding, but there was a better opportunity to ask questions on Saturday morning when it was a major item on the agenda. It was made clear that on the ‘one year’ rule for reporting abuse - permission can be given if the complaint is outside this time frame; in 2016 there were 3300 safeguarding concerns, and 867 agreements are in place; a debate should be held in July.

On safeguarding: basic checks are required for lay people leading worship, not enhanced DBS; gender dysphoria came up - reflection on this will be in the new teaching document on human sexuality which is planned for 2020. 30% of clergy are SSWMs at present, but there is no bishop currently to support.

Setting God's People Free - 27 dioceses are now in Learning Communities, and the first supporting materials have now been published.

There has been a fall in children's attendance - 22% between 2006- 2016. New material from Australia is to be considered.

Listed Places of Worship grants- £42m per year until 2020; grants are available for disabled toilets and hearing loops through the Awards for All lottery fund

As usual, even with very crisp and efficient chairing the full list was not answered in the hour and a half allocated.

**The Theological Review of the Crown Nominations Commission** was particularly important after the Sheffield row about Philip North and the Oxford problem of no appointment at the first attempt. There have been difficulties and these have been exacerbated by:

- a lack of trust between Diocesan and central members
  - too much secrecy
  - lack of training for the diocesan Vacancy in See Committee
  - too much pursuit of party agendas
  - not enough power for the Archbishops in their role as chair to seek balance in the House of Bishops
  - not enough prayer or discernment
- In the debate that followed members also spoke of lack of BAME representatives, appointments of women, and a worrying lack of confidentiality. I hope that all dioceses will take note of the recommendations. There were some comments about 'tribalism' among the different groups from diocese which did not speak well of some behaviour.

**Friday began at 09.15** with Holy Communion.

#### **International visitors' addresses**

Archbishop Thabo spoke about hospitality, indaba, deepening relationships. Bishop Humphrey spoke about the tiny Christian Community in Peshawa, reaction and retaliation, the burning of churches, suicide bombings, 75-80% of the population being 'internally bruised', the need to wipe away tears, and the Church having grace to do so, offering healing. Archbishop Winston showed a film of the Polynesian islands, with traditional boats, and himself in the sea offering communion. The 1.5 degree increase in temperature limit is shaping the environmental concerns. He emphasised the importance of togetherness - 'One bangle does not make a sound'.

#### **Companion Links and The Anglican Communion**

Bishop Michael of Chester spoke about his two years in Japan, visiting Bishop Moon King and advocating work in another culture for ordinands, priests and volunteers, 'living out faith in other settings'. The Melanesian partnership with Chester diocese had led to twinning arrangements for schools, with experience of hardship and persecution for volunteers, and shared prayer and fellowship. The Youth Council representative spoke of her time in Romania. Others spoke of links with Tanzania, Zambia, Canada, and Africa. We were reminded about the division over human sexuality and asked to send LGBTI visitors on Link Visits, for the comfort and reassurance this would provide for those communities in other parts of the Communion.

#### **Food Waste - St Edmundsbury and Ipswich diocesan motion**

Farmers are angry, consumers are confused about Best Before dates, out of season foods are imported, and foodbanks have become necessary; Harvest Festivals are full of tins and packets not produce. Shockingly we waste most food at home - 71%. Retailers are now reducing this waste by giving surplus food away to charities. The motion passed resoundingly to reduce waste at home, ensure the poor are fed, and to press retailers to make arrangements to reduce waste, and encourage the Government to bring in legislation to this end.

#### **Presidential address**

++**JW** spoke about change as unsettling. He began as he often does with a lighter moment. He said he had been asked what he wanted to be called when he first became a grandfather. He could not, he said, possibly be old enough to be Grandad – that was what *his* grandfather had been called. As he had very recently become Bishop of Durham, he said his brain took a brief holiday, and he said 'My Lord Bishop'. So he became Bip, and remains Bip to the family.

He spoke of Traditional and Faithful Innovation, and Faithful Improvisation, and the way that social media is disrupting change. We were encouraged to make change in small steps. (You can find the whole address, very well worth reading, on the internet at [cofe.com](http://cofe.com))

## **Legislative Business**

Various simplification laws to provide for burials of those committing suicide; to allow priests to wear clothing other than vestments when taking services; to allow for the sale, exchange and demolition of parsonage houses; to allow setting up of land management schemes; a draft Ecumenical Relations Measure - the renaming of LEPs to Local Ecumenical Co-operative Schemes - wordy and reminiscent of shopping, and a method to allow GS meetings to be cancelled if necessary.

## **Mission and Ministry in Covenant**

The Secretary, Gareth Powell, and a former President of the Methodist Conference, Ruth Gee, were invited to speak and talked of the role of presbyters, 'one holy catholic and apostolic Church', historic episcopate locally adapted, teaching and guarding the faith, personal and collegial relationships, the parish system and Methodist circuits, the 'scandal of disunity', anger at past actions and suspicion of corporate bodies. ++JW had already called for faithful improvisation in his sermon in the morning.

The Bishop of Carlisle spoke of the covenant between the URC, Salvation Army, Methodists, Anglican, Roman Catholics, Society of Friends and Baptists, plus the Church of Scotland.

Members spoke of Messy Church, lay led congregations, past institutional failures, working together, evangelism, Setting God's People Free, the life and work of John Wesley, new churches and how we relate to them, the understanding of episcopate, and delaying tactics. There is still deep disquiet among some sections of the Anglican Church about what we may be losing if we agree to change our perception and tradition of the apostolic succession of bishop to bishop down the centuries, and this led to the motion being carried and welcomed, but with a firm commitment to further theological work on this issue: never forgetting Jesus' injunction that we 'are to be one.'

The motion to reflect further on unity was carried by the following votes:

- Bishops 35 for, 2 against, 0 abstentions
- Clergy 131 for, 23 against, 13 abstentions
- Laity 124 for, 34 against, 11 abstentions

## **Reception at Lambeth Palace**

Groups of dioceses are invited in rotation during each quinquennium to a reception at Lambeth Palace. It was Ely's turn this year, with seven others, and was a most enjoyable evening. I spoke to ++Humphrey as we shared a perching place to eat, and he told me that many Muslims (including Malala and her father), have come to him for consolation – 'a shoulder to weep on', in their grief at the continuing outrages in the name of their faith, and their horror at the way the Christian community is being treated.

++Justin said that short videos of the three archbishops are being included in the new material for 'Thy Kingdom Come' this year; and that during the filming he had seen the cameramen so moved by what ++Humphrey was saying that there were tears running down their faces.

## **Saturday 10th February**

Many members and the Archbishops gathered outside at the foot of the steps in Dean's Yard to pray silently with victims and survivors of abuse.

## **Safeguarding**

The Bishop of Bath and Wells, Peter Hancock, opened the presentation. A DVD was played with the voices of survivors, about twenty of whom were sitting in the public gallery.

The Bishop of Chichester spoke strongly about the need to train people in safeguarding, the misuse of power and the way in which investigative journalism has helped to expose abusers, and the care

needed for survivors. Bishop Rachel Treweek spoke of her deep shame when Peter Ball's offences were exposed, and the necessity of making sure parishes are fully trained and aware. Sir Roger Singleton, a member of the National Safeguarding team, had several strong points to make:

- culture change is needed
- imbalance between influence and power
- some parishes will not engage with the training
- some believe that people are trying to claim abuse for money
- parish APCMs need a full report on safeguarding
- clergy, readers, PTOs and lay people need training
- ordinands need thorough training
- interviewees should be questioned closely on their attitudes
- schools, care homes and foster homes are likely to be more rigorous than parishes
- a more sensitive approach to survivors is needed
- Bishop Peter Hancock is the lead Bishop on this issue and will be giving evidence soon at the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse. We must be ready to be criticised for poor procedures, failing to act, cover-ups. The investigation will be over two years.
- The victims attending GS were willing to meet members in a room set aside for their use.

Members commented: have we thought about spiritual abuse and of clergy spouses?

Communications officers have a role to play; should there be a parish handbook? Does the safeguarding officer have a dedicated line? Do we have a safeguarding budget? (All these can be answered affirmatively in Ely). How will the work be evaluated? All this work is ongoing. The Independent Audits of all dioceses will now be extended to Archbishops' offices, cathedrals, colleges, and training courses.

At the close of questions a young man who had been standing throughout in the gallery spoke about the presence of Satan in the building. The entire presentation was spent in silence, an acknowledgement of the seriousness of the issue.

### **Religious Communities**

Bishop David Walker, a third order Franciscan, moved this motion on the renewal of religious life in communities. He spoke about work in education, health care, mission, CMS, Church Army; 'Faithful improvisation' in new communities; the need for a new handbook. There is a huge variety of Wesleyans, Benedictines, retreats etc. Mark Russell [Church Army] has re-orientated that organisation so that priests can remain in the CA (which used not to be the case). Members talked of counter cultural living, relating to the rest of the Church, prophetic value, hallowed time, contemplative experience. Revd Canon Pat Hawkins (a former nun) said the contemplative orders are not disengaged from the world. Their grounded ministry of prayer shows this. Father Thomas Quinn spoke of his monastic order. Leicester diocese is creating a new order, 'The Tree of Life'. Evangelism happened in history through religious communities. Some Fresh Expressions are exploring the Rule of Life. Sister Anita spoke of her order as the Best Kept Secret in Anglican Life. Canada also has religious orders, active outreach, described to her as 'No honey, no money, no messing about'.

### **Digital Evangelism**

A presentation was shown giving information about the 'God With Us' campaign which reached 2 million people with 1.5 million views of the new [www.achurchnearyou.com](http://www.achurchnearyou.com) website, which has 13 million views yearly. The family prayer had 200,000 views on facebook. 89% people use the internet, 66% use a mobile phone regularly and 57% use social media. The focus is on Evangelism, Discipleship and Common Good. There are 20 new 'Faith in action films'. Comments were that we need more training from communications directors; could BSL be used more? Both Archbishops have A ratings; could the 'A Church Near You' website accommodate churches from other denominations? [not yet]. But Parish websites could be built soon using ACNY, which would provide the platform much more cheaply than by doing it alone.

## **Valuing People With Down's Syndrome**

An important debate following the news that Non-Invasive Prenatal testing is resulting in more abortions, although this was not included in the motion at the mover's request. The motion asked for more support and information for parents on being given a diagnosis, and for full inclusion at churches and in society.

Down's Syndrome people now have a life expectancy of 50 years+, resulting in increased expectations of full church membership, education through to 18+ when supported, and changes in social attitudes. There are 40,000 living with this chromosomal anomaly in the UK, one per 1000 live births. Development is hampered by heart defects and digestive problems with positive and negative aspects in learning, but continual achievements. Many are well developed socially. Only 20% of Downs people are in employment however.

Members commented on the level of support possible in small communities; the need for informed choice; the difficulty of pressure from consultants, who often seem to imply abortion is the only choice; 90% of diagnoses result in terminations; public health rationale; personal worth and value; gifts and access to church membership. One priest confined to a wheelchair spoke of her experiences, 'Being born with a disability is not a disaster - I know I am what God made me to be'. This motion was amended to include Dr John Appleby's amendment to provide prospective parents with full information with no implied reference to outcome.

Although no one with Downs had been included in the presentation, there was a video clip at the end of a number of smiling youngsters signing and speaking their thanks, which was very much appreciated by the Synod.

++Justin prorogued the session at 4.00pm

The usual health warning: this was my experience of General Synod – others may have different opinions.

Janet