



Welcome to this edition of the General Synod Digest.

Clergy Terms of Service

Synod approved the first draft of a measure that will replace clergy 'Freehold' with 'Common Tenure'. Not only that but many clergy who now have little or no legal protection (team vicars, diocesan staff etc.) will have the same protection under law as Incumbents. At the same time a 'Capability' procedure will be introduced so that clergy who are no longer able to fulfill their duties can, after a careful and supportive process, in the last resort, be removed from office. This process will make clergy more accountable but will also offer them better legal protection, something demanded of us by government. Churches will remain, as now, as property of the Incumbent but there is still disagreement as to whether vicarages should remain as clergy property or be transferred to the diocesan parsonage board. The measure now goes to the revision committee. If you have strong views – let them know what they are.

Church Schools



Encouraging reports were given of the huge recent increase in Church Secondary Schools. Praise was offered for those involved in achieving

this and for all staff who work in the field of education.

Synod was reminded of the huge numbers of children who come into contact with the Gospel through going to a church school and the Church was encouraged to see church schools as a main plank in the mission of the Church.

Main Item on the Agenda: Gay and Lesbian Christians in the Church

Since the 1980s, the Church of England – English Bishops, Lambeth Conference Bishops and Synod – has struggled to come to terms with a society in which people with a homosexual orientation and lifestyle are increasingly respected and supported legally. This 'private member's' motion was brought to the Synod as a way of affirming that a homosexual orientation is in itself no bar to a faithful Christian life, and inviting local churches to affirm more honestly the contribution which such people make to the Church. It did not however seek to change the Church's present stance on sexual relations between those of the same sex.

It was, as we would expect, a contentious issue on both sides of the debate. (It was also a sensitive one following the recent meeting in Tanzania of all the Anglican Archbishops, where same sex relationships were discussed.) Some spoke movingly of the great pain, discrimination and fear experienced in Church life by many gay Christians and priests. Others spoke equally powerfully of the need to re-assert what they believe are clear Biblical injunctions against gay sex.

No one seemed to doubt that people of a homosexual orientation should be welcomed, affirmed and feel safe in the local and national church. Rather, the issue was about the appropriateness of same sex relations in the light of certain Biblical texts which for them clearly forbid such activities. Speakers disagreed both about what these texts mean, and about their relevance for today. In the end, a slightly revised, compromise motion from the House of Bishops was passed which in essence expressed support for a better and more supportive welcome for gay people by the Church.

Criminal Justice:

The Synod received a report on the Criminal Justice System and heard a talk by the Director General of the Prison service. A motion was passed which expressed concern at over crowding, requested the Government to promote effective non custodial sanctions and the practice of restorative justice.



Civil Partnerships



Since the recent Parliamentary Act more than 15,000 Civil Partnerships have been entered

into. The Church's anxieties about the bill were expressed in the House of Lords, but since then diocesan Bishops have issued often differing guidelines, but all forbidding any forms of service which bless such partnerships.

This private member's motion sought to re-affirm Christian values about relationships in this context, and greater clarity from the Bishops about discipline.

Many speakers were anxious to make clear that these partnerships were not, and could not, be 'marriages'; others still felt that their existence would undermine the doctrine of marriage.

Many spoke movingly of the Christian love and joy experienced by gay people in stable, often very long-standing, relationships. Some remained very troubled by the changing climate which in one sense the Church now had to accept as a reality.

In the end, a rather 'softer', amended motion suggested by the Bishops was accepted.



A presentation on "Fresh Expressions" was given to the General Synod which included a DVD of a number of rural initiatives including reaching out to surfers on a beach, special services in a country church and the development of meetings in people's homes. The church continues to be challenged to think of new ways of spreading the gospel.

Clergy Pensions New government regulations have forced the church to be much more 'prudent' in its pension provision for clergy. In practice, however, it means higher payments for dioceses. Should we change the pension from the current 'defined benefit' scheme to a 'defined contribution' scheme – as has happened for most people outside the public sector in recent years?

In the end we decided to stick with the existing scheme – whilst increasing the number of years for a full pension for new and younger members from 37 to 40 years and linking the rise in pensions to RPI rather than salary. We will still have to pay more but clergy who have served the church for many years will continue to enjoy a relatively decent pension on retirement. The issue which most concerns clergy, however, is retirement housing. Many clergy still do not own a house. Many were told by the church to sell their houses to help pay for their training – something they now deeply regret. The church needs to address this issue with urgency, particularly given the steep rise in house prices that have made it impossible for some clergy ever to own their own home, or indeed to retire to an area near where they may have lived for most of their lives.

Trident



Following Archbishop Rowan's lead, who spoke strongly against the proposed upgrading of Trident, Synod authorised the C of E's Mission and Public Affairs Council to tell the Government that the upgrading is 'contrary to the spirit of the UK's obligations in international law and the ethical principles underlying them.

Canon B44, brought to Synod by Ely Diocese, was committed to revision in committee. This will mean LEPs will no longer be forced to hold an Anglican Eucharist on all the major festivals, but can make workable provisions in consultation with the Bishop. Great news!

Update on new Marriage Regulations

You may have been waiting eagerly for the opening up of churches to marry people not previously eligible but ... it's all back in the melting pot as the revision committee narrows down the criteria while Synod seems to want to open it up more. What you need is a 'Qualifying connection' (not a Demonstrable connection, as before). But exactly who will be eligible and who won't – we don't seem to be able to agree on. So watch this space – and unless you are not getting married for two or three years, arrange it in your local parish church!



If you want to know more about anything you've read here: check out the General Synod Website at www.cofe.anglican.org/news, beg, borrow or steal a copy of the church press or give one of us a ring. See above.



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General Synod

next meets from the 6th-10th July in York. If you would like a question asked or to visit and watch from the gallery please let us know.

Please pray for:

- The Archbishops and the Anglican Communion
- The legislative drafting group still thinking about the best way forward re: Women Bishops
- All those affected by our debates during the Synod week

Pastoral Measures



It did seem like a lot of anorak business involving a number of heavy documents in very legal language. However, the result of it will be to make mission and pastoral reorganisation much easier! Under the old system if you wanted to change boundaries or set up a new initiative that involved structural changes the process was slow, expensive, centralised and cumbersome. But soon your new church plant or extra-parochial fresh expression will be a lot easier to organise. The structures will be more flexible, simple and responsive. We can be grateful that a lot of patient, detailed work in committees will enable the church to respond quickly to mission opportunities in a rapidly changing world.



Do you have a question you are burning to ask?

Contact your synod rep. who can table it for you.

It must be a question of fact, not a hypothetical question, addressed to one of the C of E Boards or to the Bishops.



How does this session of Synod Business impact on the Diocese of Ely?

- **By challenging us to think of further fresh ways of reaching out to our Diocese.**
- **By encouraging us to explore ways of listening to one another more on the subject of sexuality.**
- **By encouraging us to support our church schools**
- **By making it easier for Local Ecumenical Partnerships to organise their worship where the main Minister is not Anglican.**