



GENERAL SYNOD IN YORK

JULY 2011

CHALLENGES FOR THE NEW QUINQUENNIAL - NEXT STEPS

At the opening of the Synod last November the Archbishop of Canterbury set out three challenges for the five-year life span of this General Synod. At this group of sessions repeated reference was made to these challenges and they are certainly worth highlighting: "We are called - (i) To take forward the spiritual and numerical growth of the Church of England - including the growth of its capacity to serve the whole community of this country; (ii) To re-shape or reimagine the Church's ministry for the century coming, so as to make sure that there is a growing and sustainable Christian witness in every local community; and (iii) To focus our resources where there is both greatest need and greatest opportunity.

ECUMENISM

There were two important debates on relations with other Christian denominations. On Sunday afternoon Synod discussed the recent interim report on the Anglican-Methodist Covenant ("*Moving Forward in Covenant*"). After an interesting debate the Synod voted overwhelmingly to take note of the report. A note of caution was sounded over the inter-changeability of ministry between the two churches.

On Monday evening the Bishop of Guildford introduced a debate on conversations with the United Reformed Church.

ECUMENICAL GUESTS

There are always ecumenical guests and observers at Synod and this time we were pleased to welcome his Beatitude Anastasios, Archbishop of Tirana, Durrës and all Albania. His Beatitude addressed the Synod movingly on the opening day by outlining the situation in Albania and telling us of his attempts to foster good working relations with other faith groups in the country.

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Please feel free to contact us about things in this report or about items likely to come before Synod in the future.

LEGISLATIVE BUSINESS

One of the things that Synod has to do is make sure that church law gets debated, revised and, eventually, passed. We had a fair bit of legislative business during this group of sessions. It is always amazing how many people have things to say about very specialised (and rarefied) areas of church life and law.

FEES

The secular press and wider media had got hold of the story that Synod was going to approve a large increase in the fees charged for weddings and funerals. The previous Synod had approved the new principles on which the proposed new fees should be worked out. But it was clear from the informal discussions before the debate that members were unhappy with the new proposals. It was equally clear from the large number of amendments to the original motion that members were unhappy; some thought the new fees were too high and others thought that they were not high enough. In the end, after a heated debate, the motion was lost and the old scheme will remain until Synod next has a chance to debate it.

MISSION ACTION PLANNING (MAP)

On Saturday evening we had a lively debate about the need and desirability of having a national Mission Action Plan. The importance of leading from the front and having a good example set at the centre (top?) of the church was balanced with the idea that MAPs had to be local to be effective. It was encouraging to hear stories of how MAPs were being used to promote spiritual and numerical growth in other parts of the church as well as our diocese.



WORSHIP

One of the highlights of the Synod was worshipping in a packed York Minster on Sunday morning. The Archbishop of Canterbury presided at the Eucharist and the Bishop of Copenhagen was the preacher. He reminded us of the story of King Canute and also talked about the Parable of the Sower (which was the reading for the day). The sound of the Minster choir as they processed out singing Psalm 150 was uplifting and stirring.

At Evening Prayer on Sunday we had an extremely moving homily from Bishop Victoria from Christ Church, New Zealand who spoke of the situation in her diocese following the succession of earthquakes. It was encouraging to hear of her stories of resurrection following the destruction wrought by the violence of nature. The way that people have come together was a testimony that goodness is stronger than evil and that love is stronger than death.

WORLDWIDE CHURCH

The Archbishop of Canterbury drew the attention of Synod to the creation of the new State of Southern Sudan and to the perilous situation which still exists following years of civil war, bitter fighting and dreadful atrocities. We heard how the Church had been a constant beacon of hope and had been active in trying to rescue children caught up in the fighting as child soldiers.

EDUCATION

Many people will be aware that this year the 200th anniversary of the founding of the National Society which still exists to provide education for children up and down our country. At a time of uncertainty about the status of some church schools and the direction of travel nationally, it was good to reaffirm, congratulate and celebrate the involvement of the national church in the education of country for two centuries. The final debate at Synod on Tuesday morning was introduced by the Bishop of Oxford as Chair of the Board of Education. The title of the report, on which the debate was centred, had the strap line "into the next 200 years."

LITURGICAL BUSINESS

Consideration was given to the two Eucharistic Prayers for use in schools or other occasions when a large number of children will be present. These prayers have been used experimentally in several parishes (including in some parishes in our diocese) and were being presented for revision again.

ADMISSION OF BAPTISED ADULTS TO COMMUNION

was a debate which originated in Bradford Diocesan Synod. It was a request to change the canons to allow baptised (but unconfirmed) adults to receive communion. Following an animated debate the motion was lost due to a procedural move.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

On Monday afternoon there was a very important debate on a report by the Committee for Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns (CMEAC). This followed on from earlier reports about the involvement and representation of Minority Ethnic Anglicans in the structures of our church. The Synod warmly commended the report and committed itself to gather more information and statistics on Minority Ethnic Anglicans.

THEOLOGICAL

EDUCATION FUNDING

Synod discussed the need to review initial theological education in the light of government funding cuts. As an interim move, further funding will be made available to allow many university-sponsored courses to continue, although funding on these courses for those over the age of 50 will no longer come from central funds. In the longer term the Church of England will explore other routes to accreditation, while also seeking to maintain an element of partnership with some of the key universities nationally.

DRAFT BUDGET

There was financial business to attend to as the Archbishops' Council draft budget was debated on Monday afternoon. £12.5 million is set aside for Training for Ministry and a further £10.5 million for other general work of the council. The remaining £5.5 million goes towards Mission Agencies, pensions and clergy retirement housing.