

## Report on the February 2015 General Synod from Salisbury Members

General Synod met for a Group of Sessions from Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> to Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> February 2015. It was a shortened group of sessions, because Synod had met in November so that the legislation allowing the ordination of women to the episcopate could be enacted. The February meeting was marked by several unusual factors. Firstly, Libby Lane had been ordained as a bishop in York Minister two weeks before, followed by Philip North a week later. Unrest over the manner of Philip's North's ordination was in the air (with only three bishops laying on hands) and a question about this was raised in Synod. It was firmly stated that the decision was the Archbishop of York's alone and not a matter of Synod. Bishop Libby Lane appeared and spoke in Synod about a recent trip to India. She was warmly greeted by Synod.

Another factor, which preceded Synod, was unrest over the Lord Green Report, which advocates the identification, setting apart and training of a 'talent-pool' of future leaders. Again, it had been pointed out that how future leaders are identified, trained and funded is not a matter for Synod, but for the House of Bishops. Lord Green's high profile this week, in relation to the business practices of HSBC, gave a slightly surreal background to the discussions.

A press release about Lord Green can be found at:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/media-centre/news/2015/02/statement-on-the-work-of-lord-green-of-hurstpierpoint.aspx>

The other unusual factor was the use of electronic media in preparing members of Synod for our meeting. This included the use of a blog and online videos. These videos can be accessed through the Church of England Media Centre:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/media-centre.aspx>

On the first day, in the debate on the **Business Committee Report**, the Chair reported that the General Synod would do better if we met less often. The theme of the session was Reform and Renewal with the lead being taken by several

Task Groups. There was criticism that the controversial so-called 'Green Report' would not be formally debated. Members raised the plight of Christians in Iraq, the moving of the Synod to mid-week, this ruining a whole week for the working laity and the need to hear the voice of the laity.

The context for the whole Group of Sessions was set by two addresses. We were addressed by **Archbishop Bashar Warda**, Archbishop of the Chaldean Diocese of Erbil in Iraq. He said that Christianity in Iraq is going through one of its worst and hardest stages of its long history that dates back to the first century. Facing acts of terrorism and genocide, Christianity as a religion and as a culture from Mesopotamia is almost extinct. His address can be found here:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/media/2166999/address%20by%20the%20archbishop%20of%20the%20chaldean%20diocese%20of%20erbil.pdf>

The second address was the **Presidential Address given the Archbishop of Canterbury**. With benign but subtle wit, he started by parodying the management-speak of the 'Green Report' in a long sentence that he then described as 'complete rubbish'. He spoke of joy and delight in the love of God. The alternative was nervousness, uncertainty and guilt. The management and distribution of resources was important - but not the be-all and end-all. In the Church of England the love of Christ urges us on and the power of God is not dead but alive. The Gospel is good news for all people everywhere and we must share it. We should heed Archbishop William Temple's statement that in the C of E everyone must play a role. To achieve that we must give time to the reform and renewal of church structures - we cannot afford to leave it to chance. The full address can be found here:

<http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/5493/archbishop-justins-presidential-address-to-the-general-synod>

**Questions** took a new format in that all the answers were provided in advance of the Tuesday evening session. This allowed for the

actual questions to be asked from the floor to be supplementary questions, which often prove to be the more interesting ones. The questions and their answers (not supplementary ones) can be found at:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/media/2165803/questions.pdf>

Some questions touched on the Shared Conversations about Human Sexuality. It should be noted that there is now online material about this which can be found at:

<http://www.sharedconversations.org/>

There were questions around the Task Groups and the Green report and how their work would be co-ordinated. It seems there is growing concern about Task Groups, their membership and accountability: women, for example are underrepresented and appointments do not go through the Appointments Committee. Indeed, the Secretary General said it was difficult to produce a comprehensive list of task groups. In addition to the five whose reports were (or in the case of Green, was not) considered at this sitting, there are at least seven others.

Before group discussions and three debates on the Wednesday, we had several whirlwind presentations from the lead players on **the Task Groups** set up consequent upon "In Each Generation - a programme for reform and renewal of the church." (GS Misc 1976). This programme was set in motion as a result of the somewhat daunting findings of the From Anecdote to Evidence research of a year ago regarding the ongoing decline in and profile of church membership. At the present rate the Church of England could be about 20% of its size in 50 years time! It was clear that the message to Synod was that we need to address the realities we face in the next five years and beyond.

The key task of the church is to develop disciples and we commend an inspirational nine page paper (GS Misc 1977) in the name of Bishop Steven Croft of Sheffield. This would be excellent material for all dioceses and parishes to study. It concludes with an annex called "Ten Marks of a

Diocese committed to developing disciples." With regard to renewing the institution, four Task Groups were set up; these produced papers and reported to Synod. The four groups and reports are : Resourcing the Future of the Church of England (GS 1978), Resourcing Ministerial Education in the C of E (GS Misc 1979), Discerning and Nurturing Senior Leaders The Green Report, not debated to the pique of some (GS Misc 1982) and Simplification (GS 1980). Finally there was a Report from the Church Commissioners on their Funds and Intergenerational Equity – that is the principle of not taking finance from the future to fund the present (GS 1981). In relation to this principle the First Estates Commissioner suggested in a cautious presentation, but one in which he indicated a willingness to consider the release of some funding with proper safeguards, that future generations may well be agreeable to capital being released to secure a future which might not even exist without release of capital!

All this must be supported by confidence in God and the Gospel of the Jesus Christ, which the Archbishop of Canterbury focused on in his excellent and visionary presentation, and our own commitment to be disciples. "Discipleship is an invitation to the strongest hope, the deepest joy, the greatest fulfilment, the most authentic pattern of living, the highest adventure known to humanity. The call of Jesus is to have life in all its fullness (John 10:10)" GS 1977 para 14.

On the Wednesday, in preparation for an afternoon to debate the reports of the Task Groups the Synod spent the first half of a morning in groups of about 25 to share ideas on **Discipleship** and the second half in five large groups to consider one only of the Task Group Areas, a frustrating experience for those interested in more than one of the topics. Such engagements promote a sharing of ideas, an understanding of the many different views and a time for personal reflection. It was clear that there is an overwhelming desire for change and a shared commitment that this should start now. Notwithstanding the work planned for the task groups, a focus on discipleship, right across the

church, was seen as a key driver for change. At the large group sessions, Archbishops' Council members and Church Commissioners were present to pick up the ideas for further consideration.

In the discussions on Discipleship, concepts which frequently arose are these.

In churches it is presumed that members have a faith, but do they?

Training new lay church leaders is certainly a priority but training these to train the laity to be able to share their faith is a greater priority .

From outside of the church community, are we seen as followers of Jesus or just church building maintainers? How do we get across that the Kingdom is an enriched way of life?

There are real questions about Church - Society relationships nowadays. It means that if we are to be true disciples there needs to emerge a new kind of Church in a changed society. This is the area that the Synodical bodies will now move ahead with both at national General Synod level, but also within the dioceses.

The small and large group meetings led into four debates. The first, on **Discipleship** (GS1977) was presented by the Bishop of Sheffield with the motion *'That this Synod, inspired by the glory and grace of God shown in the face of Jesus Christ and mindful that the Church of Jesus Christ is called to be a community of missionary disciples and in view of its resolution of November 2013 which highlighted the priority of evangelism and making new disciples; commend the Ten Marks for Developing Discipleship for further study and reflection with a view to the development in each diocese of an action plan for implementation at diocesan, deanery and parochial level; and invite the House of Bishops to prepare a new Revised Catechism with a view to its approval by the General Synod under Canon B 2; and to identify and commission other resources to help the whole Church to live out our common discipleship.'* Synod overwhelmingly passed the motion.

The second debate was introduced by Canon John Spence and combined two reports, **'Resourcing the Future of the Church of England'** (GS1978) & **'Resourcing Ministerial Education in the Church of England'** (GS1979). The motion specifically supported the proposal that there should be a fundamental shift in central funding to the dioceses, removing the current inflexible and ineffective Darlow and Sheffield formulae, and replacing them with investment focused on fulfilling dioceses' strategic plans for growth, and with a strong bias towards the poor. It also supported the proposition that our vision is of a growing church with a flourishing ministry.

The third Report, on **Simplification**, was presented by the Bishop of Willesden (GS1980) with a proposal for legislation that will simplify and regulate some of the rules and canons of the Church of England so as to enhance mission and growth. Both during the debate and at the large group discussion that morning, it was acknowledged that the simplification review had not yet examined the needs of individual parishes and benefices and had concentrated on what impacted Diocesan offices. (Someone was heard to comment that there were more Archdeacons per square foot than had ever been seen.) The idea that there should be different and simpler rules for smaller/rural parishes is gaining ground.

The fourth Report was a proposal from the First Estates Commissioner that the **Church Commissioners** release an extra 100 million pounds over the next ten years to support changes that will equip the Church of England more effectively for sustainable mission and ministry over the coming generations. It was made clear that this would mean taking money which ought to have been kept for the next generation, but doing so on the basis that we live at a moment of crisis and action needs to be taken. It was also made clear that any decision to release this money belonged to the Commissioners, and not to Synod, but that the Commissioners would not consider such an action without the wholehearted support of Synod.

The First Estates Commissioner said that there is a clear tension between the desire and need to place additional resources into church growth and the importance of acting as good stewards of the church's resources. There are clear concerns around the impact and effectiveness of resources previously allocated to church growth, hence the desire for clearer accountability and peer review of how these additional resources will be used.

On the final day, important work was done on the **Draft Safeguarding and Clergy Discipline Measure** (GS 1952A) and draft Amending Canon No.34 (GS 1953A), which will significantly strengthen the discipline of the church in the question of good safeguarding practice and set out how and when clergy and licensed lay minister might be suspended. This is part of a strong move by the church to ensure that we provide not only sacred space, but also safe space in our buildings and congregations.

**A Private Member's Motion** (GS1972) from The Revd Canon Dr Michael Parsons was debated. Individual members of Synod can bring a motion for debate, if they have over 100 supporters, if their motion gets to the top of the list and if the Business Committee decide it is expedient for it to be debated. This motion sought to change Canon Law so that those who have taken their own lives (and who are of sound mind) can be buried in accordance with the rites of the Church of England. It came as news to many that there is a problem here as it is almost universal practice for us to conduct funerals for those who have taken their own life. But something in the law needed to be tidied up, so the motion was debated and passed.

**Liturgical business** saw the return of the proposed new alternative baptismal rite (GS1958). It was thought unhelpful in our present day, in many contexts, to use language which suggests that a child might be possessed by the devil. These new texts are alternative ones, to be used when pastorally suitable. They do not replace the standard texts, which fully express the accepted doctrine of the Church of England.

An important debate followed on a Report from the Mission and Public Affairs Council entitled '**Released for Mission: Growing the Rural Church**' (GS Misc 1092) at <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/2148423/gs%20misc%201092%20-%20rural%20multi%20parish%20benefices.pdf>

This report makes nine recommendations, the first of which is that the research shows that meaningful mission and growth are possible in rural multi-church groups where time and space is created for it to take place and where the ministry of lay people is enabled and equipped. The report merits careful study by those involved in rural parishes.

Much of the work of General Synod is not done in the debating chamber, but through Councils, Boards, Committees and Working Parties, on which many of us serve from time to time. In addition to this there are many fringe meetings that fill up meal times, so a synodical day can run from breakfast until late into the evening. Mention needs to be made of the launch of the **Churches Mutual Credit Union Ltd.** (CMCU) which opened for business on Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> February. This is a particularly significant project in the life of our church and of particular interest to us as our own Canon Antony Macrow-Wood has been the chief driving force behind it. A formal press release can be found at:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/media-centre/news/2015/02/churches-mutual-credit-union-formally-launched.aspx>

Their website is at: <http://cmcu.org.uk/>

Audio recordings of all the debates can be found at:

<https://soundcloud.com/the-church-of-england/sets/general-synod-tuesday-10th>

That takes you to the start of proceedings, but you will find an index to take you to any specific item

**The final Group of Sessions in the life of this Synod will be in York from 10<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> July**