

GENERAL SYNOD REPORT 26 February- 1 March 2007

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General Synod met in the newly refurbished Assembly Hall in Church House, Westminster for its regular Sessions with much anxiety about the future of the Anglican Communion after the Primates' meeting in Tanzania and concern about two debates on gay and lesbian issues.

THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION

Synod began with a Presidential Address from the Archbishop of Canterbury with his reflections on the Primates' meeting. He noted that the issue, though on the surface about sexuality, is really about the interpretation and authority of Scripture. He compared it with World War One in that it is a battle nobody wants but nobody can walk away from. Some progress has been made in four areas: (1) a listening process will continue, (2) there will be ongoing discussions about the theory and practice of biblical interpretation (3) The Episcopal Church in the USA has been given more time to clarify its views, and (4) a draft Covenant for the Communion for a way forward if division cannot be avoided.

PENSIONS ISSUES

An updated presentation was given about the increased funding requirement for the clergy pension scheme. The agreed way to cut costs is to restrict annual increase in clergy pensions to a maximum of 3.5% and to increase from 37 years to 40 years the service before full pension entitlement.

Comment At the Lincoln Diocese consultation an alternative way forward of making 68 the minimum retirement age had been considered and in Question time Sue Slater asked probing questions as to why this alternative had been abandoned. The answer was that it is being held in reserve just in case clergy life expectancy increases still further!

CHURCH WEDDINGS

Synod took note of the Revision Committee report on a limited easing of the qualifications for church weddings but then seemed to change its mind by asking for much wider provision for mission purposes. The matter had been recommitted for further revision.

Comment It transpired that I was the only member of Synod who had written to the Revision Committee about this wider provision but there remains concern about the pressure of too many weddings on a few churches. I spoke in the debate and suggested that any further easing of the regulations be through the licence procedure so that people were entitled to marry in those churches where they were qualified to do so but may apply by licence to marry in other churches subject to the ability of the church and the clergy to cope with the demand. The new arrangements are unlikely to apply before 2009. How far would you go in easing the present restrictions?

DRAFT DIOCESES, PASTORAL AND MISSION MEASURE

Synod gave final approval to this massive draft measure which aims to give greater flexibility in pastoral planning in a "Mission Shaped Church".

THE FUTURE OF TRIDENT

Synod expressed concern that updating the Trident nuclear weapons system is "contrary to the spirit of UK obligations in international law and the ethical principles underpinning them".

Comment: As always Synod had experts on the subject including a former submariner who armed the missiles, someone who worked for the defence contractor and an MP on the Defence Committee, but their cautious welcome of the Government's plans did not sway Synod. What do you think?

DRAFT ECCLESIASTICAL OFFICES (TERMS OF SERVICE) MEASURE

The changes to Common Tenure for all clergy, together with transfer of the legal title of parsonages to the Diocese and a "capability procedure" for clergy, have finally reached the stage of draft legislation and was approved for the review stage.

Comment The most controversial area is the transfer of the legal ownership of vicarages from the incumbent to the Diocese but given that that incumbent cannot personally gain from a sale and that the Diocese already maintains the houses and, on a sale the funds go into a Diocesan fund, I cannot see that anything of value is being given up. Am I wrong?

FRESH EXPRESSIONS

Synod was given a presentation by the Fresh Expressions team of new ways of being church in rural areas. **COMMENT:** *A new DVD is available and the "Mission Shaped Ministry" training course devised in Lincolnshire by Dr Peter Atkins is now being run around the country.*

LESBIAN AND GAY CHRISTIANS/ CIVIL PARTNERSHIPS

Two Private Members Motions came to the top of the pile for debate, the former seeking a more liberal treatment of gay and lesbian Christians, the latter from a conservative standpoint criticising the Civil Partnerships legislation & the House of Bishops' Pastoral Statement. The House of Bishops was anxious to avoid changing the present position and put forward heavy amendments to both motions. Synod went along with the Bishops in both debates but amended to the Bishops' amendments.

Comment: *Bearing in mind that this is the contentious issue at the heart of the problems in the Anglican Communion, most people felt that the debates were worthwhile and that the resolutions will not have made the international situation more difficult. Synod agreed to continue to listen to and to dialogue with those of a homosexual predisposition or lifestyle. How can we best do this in Lincoln?*

ELECTRONIC VOTING

Synod agreed to electronic voting to speed up our processes and provide an accurate record of votes.

Comment: *The main issue is whether how each Synod member has voted should be on the public record. What do you think?*

EDUCATION (200 YEARS OF CHURCH SCHOOLS AND THE DEARING REPORT FIVE YEARS ON)

Five years ago Synod agreed to place Church schools at the centre of the Church's mission and to create 100 new church schools within 10 years. This target has been achieved and may be tripled by 2012. Discussions are being held about joint C of E/ Muslim Academies.

Comment: *The Bishop of Grimsby is trying to establish at least one C of E Academy in the Diocese.*

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR CRIME

Synod was addressed by the new Director General of the Prison Service and then Synod debated and passed, nem con, a motion focussing on the restorative role of imprisonment and the role of Christians in changing lives of prisoners. **Comment:** *This is a highly topical issue with prison overcrowding in the news. Are you aware how much work our Diocesan Mothers' Union does in our local prisons?*

LOCAL ECUMENICAL PARTNERSHIPS

Synod approved for revision draft legislation easing requirements for LEPs to have Anglican Communion services on all major holy days. **Comment** *I spoke in this debate highlighting the difficulty of providing Anglican clergy to preside in every church on major holy days. Many members of LEPs are happy to celebrate communion led by a minister from any of their denominations.*

MEDIA STANDARDS: THEIR EFFECT ON INDIVIDUALS AND SOCIETY

Our final debate focussed on the decline in standards of human behaviour and asked the question to what extent is this the responsibility of the media or do we get the media we deserve?

Comment: *Would this be a good subject to debate at your Deanery Synod?*

KEEPING IN TOUCH

Each of the seven elected members is linked with particular Deaneries (see below) and we will attend as many Deanery Synods as possible to report.

The members are: **Bishops:** The Bishop of Lincoln (01522 534701)

Clergy: The Ven. Arthur Hawes, Archdeacon of Lincoln (01529 304357) Lafford, Loveden

The Revd Canon Chris Lilley (01652 652725) Axholme, Manlake, Yarborough, Haverstoe

The Revd Geraldine Pond (01476 567059) Grantham, Beltisloe, Aveland & Ness

Laity: Miss Rachel Beck, (01522 804060) Christianity, Graffoe

Miss Cynthia Bunch, (01673 844661) Corringham, Lawres, West Wold, Grimsby/Cleethorpes

Mrs Susan Slater (01775 768286) Holland East & West, Elloe East & West

Mrs Carol Ticehurst (01526 342076) Louthesk, Horncastle, Bolingbroke, Calcewaithe & Candleshoe