

General Synod July 6 - 10 2018

Synod in York is a different experience from that in London as everyone is on the campus and there is the possibility of much more social interaction. I was dreading the heat in the Central Hall, but they have installed some sort of air control – not conditioning they were careful to say – which made it a great deal easier to sit through the debates. The other thing which has changed is that the business of the day ends at 7.00pm, and there is no late session after dinner, going on until 10.00pm. We now work only from 9.00am till 7.00pm with time out for meals.

The international visitors were the Most Revd Humphrey Peters from Pakistan, Archbishop Albert Chamba from Central Africa, and Landesbischof Ralph Meister from the Evangelical Church in Germany. Humphrey Peters talked about the different denominations in his province: Lutheran, Unitarian, Methodist and Scottish Presbyterian. There are 200 million people in Pakistan, but only 3% are Christian. Their struggle is to exist and keep their identity. In South Pakistan 160 buildings have been attacked, but never the less interfaith activities are taking place. Archbishop Chamba's province has four areas: Zambia, Malawi, Botswana and Central Africa. They are very engaged in intentional discipleship, digital communications and community work. Ralf Meister spoke about the Meissen agreement, the tension after Brexit; the unity threatened by populism and separation.

The Business Committee Report outlined the thinking behind the construction of the Agenda, and noted that in view of the prevailing religious fervour over football, a 'comfort break' was planned for the Saturday afternoon workshops and seminars, so that devotees could watch the match.

Following the Simplification Group's work to edit unnecessary rules from CofE legislation there was a great deal of detailed work to do in this session on minor and sometimes major items to enable swifter decision making. This included church representation rules – lay members of Deanery Synods remain the electoral body for General Synod – hurrah! – but also included church representation for Fresh Expressions, BMOs etc. LEPs, now to be called Local Ecumenical Cooperative Schemes, in agreement with other denominations, are to be consulted about a code of practice, and the canon amended.

There were 83 Questions to be considered, and for the first time in my experience, we got through them all, though only because we started early.

Archbishop Sentamu gave the Presidential Address on Saturday morning – (++Justin was attending a baptism somewhere.) The only bit I remember was him saying that he had heard a priest say sadly 'I was trained to be a fisher of men, but my people want me to be an aquarium keeper'.

The morning's major item was on safeguarding, and it began with a moving presentation by two survivors of clerical abuse. Joan Kind from MACSAS (Minister and Clergy Sexual Abuse Survivors) and Dr Fish from SCIE (the Social Care Institute for Excellence) spoke to us. Many survivors were in the gallery, as they have been before, but this was the first time any have addressed Synod. Dr Fish spoke about accountability, an 'open learning culture', ownership of the problems, compassion and justice, and the ability to talk openly about grooming. The National Safeguarding Team

now has three survivors on the panel; safeguarding advice is in the new Parish Handbook. There were calls for openness, and to stop living in an operational bubble.

There is £7m in the 2018 budget – an indication of the scale of the problem. And the IICSA report is expected in the autumn. The motion to endorse the priorities and the plan of action was carried 368 for, 0 against, with 2 abstentions.

The seminars were on the Teaching Document: Biblical Studies, Theology, Biology, and the Pastoral Advisory Group. Canon Jessica Martin was on the biological group. The workshops were on Children and Young People, Digital Evangelism, Environmental Matters, and the Evangelism Task Group. Members' opinions on the Teaching Document were sought.

Sunday began with Holy Communion in York Minster – which always ends with the choir processing out to a wonderful rendition of the Psalm 150.

After lunch we were on to Climate Change and Investment, welcoming the Paris Agreement, affirming support for the investments of the National Investment Bodies (NIBs), and a start to disinvestment of poorly rated companies that are not reducing their carbon footprint. There was debate about this. The NIBs have 30 trillion dollars of investment, and the Pensions Board have £350m. Currently their thinking is that with that much investment potential from the Church there is more incentive to the companies to comply with our aims and policies than not. If we withdraw we have no sway over them at all.

The next debate was on the Ethics of Nuclear Weapons, and there were some notable speeches from members of the Armed Forces about Trident submarines and the privations and security necessary for submariners. Trident as a deterrent, just wars, greed, lust for power, moral and ethical pressures were commented upon. An amendment to welcome the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and publish a Church Strategy was lost. A brigadier reminded us that we are moving towards nuclear pacifism, and must remember the Cold War, and that the use of conventional weapons in the war on Japan would have resulted in many more deaths. The motion to call on the Government to welcome the new Treaty, and to respond positively, and commit the Church to join with ecumenical partners in working towards a genuine peace was passed by 260 for, 26 against and 21 abstentions.

Monday began with the Annual Report of the Archbishops' Council, followed by the Archbishops' Council's Budget and Proposals for 2019. Canon John Spence detailed the challenges we face: declining attendance, aging congregations, decline in the number of planned givers. But there are also 20% more ordinands, 1.5m digital hits each week, new work with Alexa giving info about the CofE. 42 Peer Reviews of dioceses have taken place, 169 future leaders have taken the Strategic Development course, 41 Deans have taken the mini MBA course. We need efficiency, enterprise and innovation, and are taking steps in these ways to give people the skills to achieve this. Budgets are theology in numbers, and we need to consider that in our debates. The five areas of expenditure: Training for Ministry, National Church Responsibilities, Grants and Provisions, Mission Agency clergy pension contributions and the CHARM Scheme were all approved.

The next item was Legislative Business, some for final approval: the draft Ecumenical Relations Measure, the Draft Amending Canon no 38, the Draft Church of England

Property Measure, the Draft Church of England Pensions Measure the Draft Church Representation and Ministers Measure, and the Draft Amending Canon No 39, all of which were approved. Much of this was, to a non-legal mind, of mind-numbing tediousness. But I have to remind myself and you that these measures will now become the law of this land, so I suppose we ought to take seriously all considerations which try to prevent us making bad law.

The sad thing, however, was that the length of time this legislative business took meant that we had to shorten the Agenda, and what was left out was the Report from the Archbishops' Evangelism Task group, which had been scheduled for Monday late afternoon.

There was then an address from the Most Reverend Moon Hing, Archbishop and Primate of the Church of the Province of South East Asia and Bishop of West Malaysia. His province covers 9 countries with many languages and 500million people, less than 1% of whom are Christian. In the north there are Buddhists, Communists and Socialists, as well as Hindus in Nepal. There is a lot of opportunity for misunderstanding as the only common language is English, but despite this there are 10 to 12 thousand new church members every year. Every PCC must have evangelism on the agenda, the laity a core leader, and a budget. He sees all diocesan reports, there are 100 new churches, and for all of them intentional discipleship is the key to growth.

The next debate was a Diocesan Synod Motion from Carlisle on the long-Term sustainability of the National Health Service. This motion welcomed the Report from the Select Committee, and called upon the Government to fund social care adequately, give more attention to care in the rural areas, and recruit more staff for them. People spoke about disease, ignorance and squalor, the need for compassion and the common good, loneliness and isolation. 35% of NHS staff are unwell through stress. Speakers emphasised the importance of family and friends for wellbeing – perhaps a comment on the fracturing of society through dependence on social media and not personal contact and relationships.

On Tuesday morning we had the Church Commissioners' Annual Report, which noted good returns in a demanding market; we are ahead in our 5, 10 and 20-year targets. Strategic development projects are diverse and in both provinces of the Church. Although the Commissioners have £8.3 billion this would only run the Church for 4 years if they had to pay all the bills. The 'inter generational generosity', which is funding many of the growth initiatives, such as the Market Towns Strategy in Ely, can only work if our congregations continue their daily and weekly generosity.

The next item was the Report of the Cathedrals Working Group. This had come about after the Bishop's Visitations at Exeter and Peterborough, and focussed very much on clarity between governance and management, and the importance of having adequately trained and skilled members of Chapter to deal with the multifaceted business of cathedrals today. There had been some unrest after the draft report as the Residentiary Canons had not been consulted and it was clear that the Working Group had not understood their role. This was to some extent corrected in the final report. An amendment to bring the draft Measure for First Consideration at the July 2019 sessions rather than the February ones was carried; and to get on with all the recommendations which do not require legislation as soon as possible.

The final item before the farewells was the report of the Standing Committee, which made some minor amendments to procedures for PCCs and General Synod.

++Sentamu reported that Professor Michael Clark, Chair of the Dioceses Commission, who had worked for the GS for 28 years was retiring, and we all thanked him warmly. And Alistair Redfearn, Bishop of Derby, (and married to Caroline Boddington who is the Archbishops' Advisor for Appointments and works with the Crown Nominations for appointing bishops), is retiring. He founded the Clewer Initiative – concerned with modern day slavery, and we also thanked him.

Synod was Prorogued just before 1.00pm

This report carries my usual health warning – this is my version, and I may well have made mistakes.

Janet Perrett