

General Synod Report 15th - 17th November 2021

This was the first Synod of a new five year term and the first physical meeting for 20 months. To help the 60% of new members, the **Monday** was an Induction day to teach new members the geography of Church House (more complex than you would think!), how to operate the electronic voting system and the difference between a Measure and a Canon in CoE legislation.

Tuesday was the first formal day of the Synod with the Inaugural Service of Holy Communion at Westminster Abbey. His Eminence Archbishop Angaelos, the Coptic Orthodox Archbishop of London, preached on the story of Zacchaeus, and how his response to the Lord's call led to his repentance and thus restoration and justice for his victims. The Archbishop encouraged us not to be so focused on what we are doing, but to look out among the sycamore trees for those needing, but not seeking, our attention.

Later in the morning at the Inauguration ceremony in Church House, after an introduction by the Archbishop of Canterbury, His Royal Highness The Earl of Wessex read a message from the Queen regretting that she could not attend and praising the way the Church has responded to the pandemic, bringing the gospel of hope to the people of our country. The Archbishop of York replied thanking Prince Edward and highlighting the future work of the Synod.

Tuesday afternoon started the real work with a welcome to Alan Smith, the new First Estates Commissioner (Chair of Church Commissioners' Assets Committee). Alan has an impressive background in investment and sustainability and described himself as a Banker from Barbados who is Bearded, Balding and Black!

The Archbishops then gave a joint President Address. Archbishop Justin opened by encouraging us to "cast your nets on the right side of the boat". Outlining changes in church attendance since 1850, he said that "alterations in the nature of society require changes, but not the abandonment of principles". Archbishop Stephen said that although Synod is an elected legislative body, it is not a parliament and has no government and opposition; rather we should journey together through the uncharted territory of Covid, Climate Change, Numerical decline and Financial challenge. We should strive to be a Christ-centred church, Simpler, Humbler and Bolder, and accepting that one size does not fit all. He reiterated his commitment to the parish and stressed the importance of "place" in our mission.

Canon Simon Butler led calls for a debate on the Ghanaian Family Values Bill which makes being LGBTQIA an imprisonable offence in Ghana. Archbishop Justin said that he had spoken to the Ghanaian bishops, but refused to be drawn further.

Synod then debated a motion to draw up legal changes that would allow more wealthy dioceses to transfer money and assets to less wealthy dioceses. Historically some dioceses (eg Oxford, Lincoln) which have existed for a long time, own considerably more land and investments than more recently-formed dioceses (eg Liverpool). St Edmundsbury and Ipswich is around the middle so is unlikely to be massively affected. The motion was carried, but it will be interesting to see what happens when detailed proposals which will cause dioceses to give away money come back for debate at future Synods.

Wednesday morning started with another debate about financial inequality, this time calling on the government to reduce the wealth gap between rich and poor. It was reported that the wealthiest 0.1% own as much as the total of the 50% least well off, and this leads to major differences in life expectancy and levels of disability. The UK wealth gap is higher than in most European countries and is widening due to rising asset values. Speakers highlighted how poverty and disability magnify each other, and that greed is the underlying sin and our hearts need to change. Andrew Gray from our diocese spoke in favour of more supported housing being made available. In a counted vote the motion was overwhelmingly carried but surprisingly 2 members voted against.

Then John Spence gave a very stirring speech outlining the Archbishops' Council budget for 2022. Partly due to the work being led by Bishop Martin on Transforming Effectiveness in the National Church Institutions, a reduction of 3.7% is being proposed in the apportionment charged to dioceses. This is welcome news as nationally parish giving is running at 10% below 2019 pre-covid levels, and 2% below 2020 levels. Given the growth in the church's assets, John recognised the pressure to release more money to parishes, but stressed the need to get the intergenerational balance right.

The Synod then appointed Mark Sheard (who actually lives in our diocese) for a further term on the Archbishops' Council.

The Vision and Strategy presentation started with a short film about Ministry in Suffolk. Bishop Mike introduced examples of fresh expressions: Diane Grano talking about the Lightwave work at Red Lodge, Julia Lall described Connect, and Julie and Ian Daniels talked about the Lindbergh Road Community Church in a marquee in their front garden. Josh Hunt explained the importance of his role as Chaplain at Felixstowe School. It was great to see our diocese highlighted so favourably. Archbishop Stephen explained that the strategy was the revitalisation of the parish, not its demise and encouraged the development of missionary disciples, in a mixed ecology church that was growing younger.

The 7 National Church Institutions are too fragmented with overlaps and items falling between the gaps, is the conclusion of the Governance Review Group. Their principle recommendations were merging many of the governance bodies (which should lead to a reduction in the current 122 sub-committees), and enhancing the role of the College of Bishops. Their 50+ page report was accepted in principle, but there is much more work to be done to turn it into actual proposals which will come before Synod again.

The final item of business was a set of farewells to retiring key people:

Eve Poole - the 3rd Estates Commissioner.

Caroline Boddington - the Archbishops appointment secretary who had overseen the appointment of all the bishops since 2004.

Christopher Lowson - the Bishop of Lincoln.

Christine Hardman - the Bishop of Newcastle.

The synod then was prorogued (closed) until February.