

General Synod Friday 8th July to Tuesday 12th July 2016

At York University

Report to Diocesan Synod

Introductions were made and a welcome was extended to ecumenical members from Germany, Norway & Ireland. There was speech by the German guest from Hanover, Landesbischof Ralf Meister.

There was a debate on EU referendum lead by the Archbishop of Canterbury. This was a late admission to the programme and yielded up a lively debate. The debate recognised the divisions in society that had been uncovered by the outcome of the Referendum. It recognised the fear people feel in the midst of the great uncertainty - will we leave the EU and will Art. 50 be invoked? The challenge was to be Godly in a way that says we have not left Europe spiritually even if politically we do so.

The Anglican Bishop in Europe spoke - he lives in Belgium. He spoke about the tears shed by people in Europe that he knew or had met since the result of the Referendum. He said there was shame, anger and sadness. He said we need to sow our European connections now more than ever. Caroline Spellman, one of the Church Estates Commissioners, put compassion and reconciliation themes at the forefront of her comments. This was a time of opportunity for making connections with people in our communities where politicians have failed to connect (in response to the alienation people feel about the remoteness of politicians).

There was a presentation about the Anglian Consultative Council's trip to Lusaka in Zambia. Margaret Swinson and Bishop of Chelmsford who had made the trip both spoke.

Appointments were made to Archbishops Council (by extending the tenure of two members) to bring stability to a body that has a lot of new members.

The Church Commissioners' annual report was presented by Mr Andreas Whittam Smith. This body has stewardship of church funds. In 2015 there had been growth of 8%. The annual target is inflation plus 5%. He said the average gain over 30 years was 9-10%. There was a slightly gloomier outlook going ahead because of slow down in the world economy. Mr Whittam Smith did say the Church Commissioners were prepared for the potential impact of Brexit. This was because of the investments portfolio in real estate and forestry which in so many words suggested some resilience from the market forces. Mr Whittam Smith also explained that the Church Commissioners had made investments to support credit unions and made land available for social housing projects. It also regularly reviewed its investments portfolio to ensure investments were as green as they could possibly be.

On Friday evening Synod dealt with the questions from members that had been tabled in the week or so before the commencement of the session. Several of the questions related to the case of Bishop Bell and the settlement of the claim against regarding him. There is to be an independent review into the handling of the case. There were questions around why there was perceived to be a lack of transparency to the process. There was clearly tension around this topic from the members of Synod seeking answers.

On Saturday morning Synod debated legislation. These included the Mission and Pastoral etc. (Amendment) Measure, a draft Legislative Reform Measure, a draft Inspection of Churches Measure and draft legislation concerning Canon No 36 (church vestments). In respect of the first two pieces of legislation there was debate about simplification encroaching too much and in some cases doing away with proper consultation. Attempts were made to introduce amendments to the Mission and Pastoral Measure that would cure the perceived lack of safeguards to reorganisation of parishes. These were defeated. In respect of the Legislative Reform Measure similar comments were made in debate about the absence of consultative safeguards - striking a balance between how much needs to appear on the face of the measure and how much would be implicit in the process without having to spelt out.

Vestments and burial rites for those who commit suicide but are of sound mind was before the Synod. There were debated and sent back for revision. Most questions were about the missional value of vestments. Some took the view they made a difference, others took an opposite view. What was clear was that strict adherence to vestments had not been honoured for some time so the debate was described by one member as more about *theory* than *practice*.

The Venerable Cherry Vann presented a report which sought to capture what the Church of England's Renewal and Reform programme amounted. This was a concise statement of a huge programme of change which seeks to promote revival for the church over a generation.

A vision for church schools presented by the Bishop of Ely as part of a 'take note' debate. There was a debate about the wording of the report he presented and whether it's vision conveyed a distinctively Christian message and would provide a distinctively Christian education. There was also a call for a search for vocation in those who teach in CoE schools.

The Bishop of Truro presented a report on nurturing and developing senior leaders - he leads the Developments and Appointments Group ('DAG'). This report explained the work taking place around developing potential in Bishops and Deans and others for leadership roles. There were some specific initiatives underneath this overarching title : a mini-MBA for cathedral leadership; women in leadership; BAME clergy. It was noted that disabled clergy were under-represented. Conservative Evangelical and Catholic clergy were also noted to be unrepresented and there was to be an initiative that would enable them to explore similar vocations.

Finally the Archbishops' Council annual report and financial statements for 2015 were presented. There was an explanation of its role and the areas of oversight. The report was a demonstration of how it contributes to building Gods Kingdom. Some examples were given of its works : WW1 repairs fund for churches, Pilgrimage to Paris (climate change), credit unions, Justpray website and CEMES. There was an approval of the Archbishops' Council's annual budget for the coming year as well. During the debate Canon Spence, who presented the budget, sought to dispel the myth that the new formula for funding (in succession to the Darlow formula) favoured urban over rural mission.

The above work took the General Synod up to late on Saturday night. The remainder of the time was given over the shared conversations.

Carl Fender
11 July 2016