

**INTRODUCTION**

This year’s February group of sessions in London was shorter than usual—just 2½ days—but there was a fairly ‘meaty’ agenda, with 749 pages of papers for members to read.<sup>1</sup> Some of these papers (many of the ‘GS Misc’ papers) are for information only and were not the subject of an agenda item.<sup>2</sup> The meeting was also unusual in that, for the first time in London, it included a Saturday: feedback will indicate whether this experiment should be repeated. [Rail replacement buses on the journey home suggest not!]

**DAY 1 – THURSDAY AFTERNOON, 8 FEBRUARY**

After the opening worship and the welcome to three visiting bishops (from South Africa, Pakistan and Polynesia) and 22 new Synod members (one bishop; one dean: Jane Hedges from Norwich replacing Frances Ward; 16 clergy and 4 lay members) the first short debate was on the customary motion to ‘take note’ of the **Business Committee Report**. This provides the opportunity for members to comment on the agenda—and what is not on it but which they think should have been included. The Revd David Banting (Chelmsford) spoke of the need for Synod to spend time discussing ‘Bible and theology’ and the fact that the ‘contingency’ dates for Synod meetings in November 2016 or 2017 had not been used. Jonathan Alderton-Ford also commented on the need for longer synods and debates, and for more time for Synod members to spend listening to each other. There is clearly an issue here of ensuring proper consideration of controversial issues while keeping a tight rein on the cost of Synod meetings.

Professor Oliver O’Donovan (chairman of the review group) then presented the report **“Discerning in Obedience: A Theological Review of the Crown Nominations Commission”**.<sup>3</sup> The group’s report makes a number of proposals and recommendations about the work of the CNC in choosing diocesan bishops, the election of the central and diocesan members of the CNC, and the election of diocesan Vacancy in See committees. Professor O’Donovan introduced the unanimous report by saying that the proposals were *“on the revolutionary side of evolutionary: neither too bland nor too bloody.”* He emphasised that the process of discernment was one of looking forward: which candidate will be best for a diocese for the next few years, not who has been the best archdeacon etc. There was also a need to tackle the culture of excessive secrecy, but within a wall of confidentiality. After a good debate, Synod voted to take note of the related report GS 2080, which includes a table setting out how the proposals are to be implemented.

The first day finished with **Questions**. Here, St Eds & Ips members kept up the tradition of our diocese of ‘punching above its weight’ by asking 10 of the 93 questions (each Synod member is entitled to ask two questions per group of sessions.) Many of the questions (and the supplementaries) related to the case of Bishop George Bell and the responses to the Carlile report (GS Misc 1173) that have featured in the media over the last few weeks.<sup>4</sup>

**DAY 2 – FRIDAY 9 FEBRUARY**

The only full day began with a service of **Holy Communion**, at which Archbishop Justin presided, after which Synod heard addresses from the three visiting primates, Thabo Makgoba (Cape Town), Humphrey Peters (Pakistan) and Winston Halapua (Polynesia). In his address, Archbishop Thabo said that hospitality was the key for dialogue, it was *“about relationships, making room in our hearts for one another.”* A debate followed on a motion, proposed by the Bishop of Guildford (Andrew Watson), affirming **companion links between C of E dioceses and other parts of the Anglican communion**. The related report, GS 2081, lists the many such links, including our own with Kagera in Tanzania.

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<sup>1</sup> All the papers, including those referred to in this report, can be downloaded from the General Synod pages of the Church of England website:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/policy-and-thinking/work-general-synod/agendas-papers/general-synod-february-2018>.

The *Church Times* on 16 February 2018 included an 8-page report of all the debates at the Synod.

<sup>2</sup> One of the GS Misc papers (GS Misc 1177B) is the 100-page ‘Draft Report for Consultation’ of the Cathedrals Working Group (CWG). The CWG, chaired by the Bishop of Stepney, was set up to look at the way cathedrals are governed in the wake of concerns arising from visitations of Peterborough and Exeter cathedrals and the call for a review by the Bishop of Peterborough in January 2017. The deadline for responses to the consultation is 28 February 2018.

<sup>3</sup> GS Misc 1171, to be read together with GS 2080.

<sup>4</sup> The Q&A paper, “NP Questions”, setting out the questions and written answers, is on the C of E website.

The last item in the morning was a debate on our diocesan motion on **Food Waste**.<sup>5</sup> Proposing the motion from the platform, Andrew Dotchin produced a loaf of bread, broke it in half, and dramatically tossed one half into the chamber, saying “*Half the world is starving, half is obese. This motion is about food poverty and food insecurity. There is no reason why we cannot feed the world. We’ve forgotten that we do not inherit the world from our parents; we borrow it from our children.*” He concluded with the prayer: “*To those who are hungry, give bread; to those who have bread, give a hunger for justice in the world.*” The motion, slightly amended during the debate to improve it, was ‘clearly carried.’<sup>6</sup>

**Friday afternoon** began with Justin Welby’s **Presidential address**, in which the Archbishop spoke about change, and how it unsettles us. He spoke of the need for culture change in the church and for what he called ‘faithful innovation and improvisation’. He concluded: “*If we may develop a love filled, faithful improvisation we have the certain hope of a Church renewed and revived, serving the Common Good, lifting up the Glory of Christ and revealing the Kingdom.*”<sup>7</sup>

Synod then turned its attention to **legislative business**. Amending canons on **clergy vesture** and on **funerals for those who had committed suicide** had received Royal Assent and were ‘made, executed and promulgated.’ The draft **Ecumenical Relations Measure** and **Church of England (Miscellaneous Provisions) Measure** were revised and returned to their respective steering committees for final drafting, and Synod agreed to change the name of the suffragan see of Richmond (in the Diocese of Leeds) to Kirkstall.

The day ended with addresses from the Revd Ruth Gee (past president of the Methodist Conference) and the Revd Gareth Powell (secretary of the Methodist Conference) before debating the report ‘**Mission and Ministry in Covenant**’ (GS 2086) which seeks to bring our two churches into communion after many decades of dialogue and the Covenant signed in 2003. For the Methodist church, this would involve including bishops, as well as presbyters and deacons, as ordained ministers. For some, these issues remain difficult. The debate ended with the first of only two counted votes this Synod, the motion welcoming the report being passed in all three houses and by an overall 78% of members present and voting.<sup>8</sup>

### **DAY 3 – SATURDAY 10 FEBRUARY**

The day started with a presentation on **Safeguarding** and the C of E’s preparations to give evidence to IICSA in March, when the focus will be on the Diocese of Chichester. This was preceded at 9.00 am by a quiet demonstration by ‘survivors’ of sexual abuse within the Church in Dean’s Yard (outside Church House), which was attended by the two archbishops and many other Synod members. A moving booklet, “*We asked for BREAD but you gave us STONES*”, in which victims of abuse addressed the church in their own words, had been distributed to all Synod members and highlighted that the Church has a long way to go in addressing this issue. We were virtually promised a debate on this important subject at York in July. A debate on **Religious Communities** followed, with a motion calling on the Business Committee “to introduce a new Canon to the Synod by July 2018 to provide a framework for religious life in the Church of England.” In a presentation on **Digital Evangelism**, we were updated on the work of the digital communications team at Church House. One statistic: the #GodWithUs campaign in Advent 2017 reached 6.8 million people. After lunch, Synod ended with a debate on a motion, **Valuing People with Down’s Syndrome**. There were many moving speeches, including one from Tiffer Robinson. The Revd Rachel Wilson (Rochester), speaking from a wheelchair, told Synod that “*being born with a disability is not a disaster. I know myself to be wonderfully made in the image of God. If it was good enough for God, it was OK with me.*” The Bishop of Carlisle, James Newcombe, who proposed the motion, resisted amendments that might have been interpreted as touching on the wider issue of the status of the human embryo, while acknowledging that this was a debate to be had, but after proper preparation for it. On a counted vote of the whole Synod, the motion was passed by 284 votes to none against. Archbishop Justin **prorogued** the Synod at 4.00 pm. We meet next in York on Friday 6 July 2018.

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<sup>5</sup> Agreed unanimously by Diocesan Synod on 12 November 2016. The motion was contingency business at the York Synod meeting in July 2017 but was not then reached.

<sup>6</sup> Inter alia, the motion “*urge[s] all dioceses and parishes to work with other voluntary initiatives to lobby for all local food retailers to review their policy on waste food so that the amount made available to combat food poverty is maximised; request[s] Her Majesty’s Government to consider how it might most effectively act to minimise food waste by food retailers whether by encouraging voluntary action, taking fiscal measures or, if necessary, bringing forward legislation; and call[s] upon all church members to use food resources responsibly and minimise waste in their own homes.*”

<sup>7</sup> The full text of the address is on the Archbishop’s website: <https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/speaking-and-writing/speeches/synod-archbishop-canterburys-presidential-address>

<sup>8</sup> Bishops: 35 for, 2 against; Clergy: 131 for, 23 against, 13 recorded abstentions; Laity: 124 for, 34 against, 11 abstentions. The motion also affirmed Synod’s “*confident hope that any outstanding issues between our Churches may be resolved quickly and satisfactorily and look forward to the day when, on the basis of work already completed and accepted, our ministries will be fully reconciled.*”