

## General Synod Report February 2017

### Monday 13<sup>th</sup> February

Before Synod began at three o'clock on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> February 2017, there was a special meeting of the House of Clergy to discuss a new paper on clergy wellbeing. It was agreed that the document was excellent and that more work should be done by the whole church to improve the quality of life and nature of service of our clergy.

After the normal worship, introductions and welcomes, there was a report by the Business Committee GS2043. It became very clear in this discussion about the agenda for the forthcoming synod that there was going to be a great deal of passion and anger expressed at the Bishops' Report later on that week. We then discussed holding London Synods to include Saturday and, while there was some opposition, these suggestions were accepted. We also celebrated the theological gifts that came to the church through the reformation.

We then had an excellent Presidential Address in which the Archbishop of Canterbury used the temptations of Christ as referred to in Matthew and Luke's gospels as a pretext of understanding the work that synod had to do. He advised us of the dangers of the temptations we face in the exercise of power. It was a logical link to make connections with the recent electoral decisions across the world. His point was to emphasise that as a church facing a very uncertain world, we need to hold together, given the shift to the Right across Europe and the return of some fascist style leaders.

This was followed by questions which covered the usual wide range of topics and for the first time in all my experience in synod, the seventy three questions were all answered despite the fact most of them had supplemental questions.

### Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> February

We began with Holy Communion, a sermon by the Archbishop of York, and then a farewell to Sir Andreas Whittam Smith, the first estates commissioner. The son of a vicarage, he founded the Independent Newspaper, was the National Censor and for the last fifteen years has been in charge of the Church Commissioners' finances. In that time our investment portfolio has grown from £5b to £7b and that despite the recession. His wit, wisdom and intelligence as well as his compassionate heart will be missed. In his closing remarks he did point out that he remains optimistic about the future of the Church of England.

This was followed by an attempt by a member of the general synod through a Private Members motion to remove the use of banns as a preliminary to marriage. After a long and stimulating debate, synod decided decisively to remain with the system we already have.

We then began a huge tranche of ecclesiastical business. (See below) The first was the final approval for the Mission and Pastoral Amendment Measure, which gives the church more flexibility in planting new churches, coming up with new solutions for structural, pastoral problems; enabling Bishops to create new sorts of churches and new parish projects. It also slims down some of our rather cumbersome procedures.

Next we looked at the Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction Care of Churches Measure which was to consolidate a whole range of laws dating back to the middle of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, again to make such things simpler to operate. Again, this went through virtually without comment.

In the afternoon, we dealt with the statute law repeals, pensions' provision and final draft simplification measure, the Ecclesiastical Terms of Service amendment, and we also looked at a composite set of legislation dealing with Ecumenical Relations and the Governance of the Church of England. In this particular area there were several contributions from the diocese of St. Edmundsbury and Ipswich. We expressed concerns about parochial experience needed to be an Archdeacon, the correct use of the electoral roll for elections and the number of meetings that a PCC should have per annum.

### Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> February

After our initial worship, we received and accepted a petition to create a suffragan see in the diocese of Leicester. The new Bishop would be called the Bishop of Loughborough.

Then we had an excellent debate on fixed odds betting terminals in which synod voted decisively that the maximum stake for these machines should be reduced from £100 to £2 and amended its motion to support the work of the Bishop of St. Albans who is working with Parliamentary Committees to require the Treasury to become tougher with the licensing of these devices. The final vote for this was 310 in favour with no votes against.

We then had a presentation on sexuality from the Bishop of Willesden and the Bishop of Norwich. After lunch we went into groups as we did in York last year, but in protest 48 members boycotted the groups. Later on that afternoon we had the Take Note debate on the House of Bishops report GS2055. This has created a great deal of interest in the media most of which has been wrongly reported as there was no vote in favour of gay marriage. Rather, people were objecting to the tone of the report and it would make very slow progress with reviewing liturgy and other issues. Many of its opponents were distressed by the implication that there was no appetite in the General Synod or in the church to reform the historic core documents to allow gay marriage. When it came to the vote it had to pass it had to have majorities in all three houses. The vote was: Bishops 43 for 1 against 0 abstained. Clergy 93 for 100 against 2 abstained. Laity 108 for 83 against 4 abstained. You will see that the overall majority of the voters were in favour, but it was only lost by seven votes in the House of Clergy.

What this means is that the House of Bishops has to think again and come up with a fresh set of proposals. In addition to that the Archbishop of Canterbury committed us to a new teaching document covering the full range of sexuality, including gay and lesbian relationships.

#### **Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> February**

After our worship, we said a very moving and humorous farewell to the Bishop of London, Dr. Richard Chartres; we then had a powerful speech on unity from Dr. Josiah Atkins Idowo-Fearon, Secretary General of the Anglican Communion.

We then had a debate on 'Setting God's People Free' which was a document from the Archbishops' Council about empowering the laity. This will prove to be a very important and significant document.

As we had more time than was planned time we were able to look at Gavin Oldham's motion to ask the Archbishops' Council to consider reforming our central structures so less administration is done by the dioceses and more is done centrally. Synod, after amendment decided to proceed with this idea. At that point synod was prorogued at one o'clock, approximately four hours ahead of time and although some of us went to our lunchtime fringe meetings, most people went home.

However there was one thing decided that week which is very good news and not decided by synod it is Bishop Martin has been elected to Archbishops' Council and appointed Chair of Ministry Council (head of the Ministry Division) by Archbishops Justin & Sentamu.

**Jonathan Ford      February 2017**

#### *Items covered by this synod were*

##### **Monday 13th February 2017**

[GS 2043](#) - Report by the Business Committee

[S 2044](#) - Anniversary of the Reformation

[GS Misc 1156](#) - Statement on the Reformation Anniversary

##### **Tuesday 14th February 2017**

[GS 2045A](#) & [GS 2045B](#) - Preliminaries to Marriage

[GS 2014B](#) & [GS 2014Z](#) - Draft Mission and Pastoral etc.

(Amendment) Measure

[GS 2031A](#) & [GS 2031Y](#) - Draft Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction and Care of Churches Measure

[GS 2027A](#) & [GS 2027Y](#) - Draft Legislative Reform Measure

[GS 2030](#) & [GS 2030x](#) - Draft Statute Law (Repeals) Measure

[GS 2032A](#) & [GS 2032Y](#) - Draft Pensions (Pre-consolidation) Measure

[GS 2046](#) & [GS 2046x](#) - Draft Church Representation, Ecumenical and Minister Measure

[GS 2047](#) & [GS 2047x](#) - Draft Amending Canon No. 38 [

[GS 2048](#) & [GS 2048x](#) - The Ecclesiastical Offices (Terms of Service) (Amendment) Regulations 2017

[GS 2049](#) & [GS 2049x](#) - The Church of England Pensions

(Amendment) Regulations 2017 [GS 2050](#) & [GS 2050x](#) - The

Safeguarding (Clergy Risk Assessment) Regulations 2016

[GS 2051](#) & [GS 2051x](#) - Legal Officers (Annual Fees) Order

2016

[GS 2029A](#), [GS 2029AA](#) & [GS 2029Y](#) - Draft Amending

Canon No. 36 & Draft Amending Canon No. 37

##### **Wednesday 15th February 2017**

[GS 2052](#) - Suffragan See for the Diocese of Leicester

[GS 2053](#) - Appointment to the Archbishops' Council

[GS 2054A](#) & [GS 2054B](#) - Fixed Odds Betting Terminals:

Reduction of Maximum Stake

[GS 2055](#) - Marriage and Same Sex Relationships after the

Shared Conversations: A Report from the House of Bishops

##### **Thursday 16th February 2017**

[GS 2056](#) - Setting God's People Free: Report from the

Archbishops' Council

##### **Contingency Business**

[GS 2057A](#) & [GS 2057B](#) - Mission & Administration