

## **Adrian Vincent's General Synod election address. August 2010.**

**Why vote for me? Three reasons:**

### **1.) Working more efficiently**

On my website I give examples of where money might be saved through reducing duplication and unnecessary expenditure at national and diocesan level. Such savings would limit the future increases in parish share.

General Synod needs to change. There are too many 'talking shop' motions that have no practical effect. The February Synod passed a resolution that a belief in God and an understanding of science are compatible. They passed another motion telling parishes to "teach the Bible". The Synod telling us what we already know is not the best use of parishioners' donations.

### **2.) Increasing openness and participation**

Before each Synod meeting I will list on my website the items coming up for debate at General Synod and invite you to send me your views. (I will have a mailing list for those without access to the internet). After each meeting I will publish on the website the decisions that were taken, how I voted and why. If I ever claim any expenses I will publish them on my website.

I will work for change to ensure that everyone on an electoral roll will have the right to vote for their General Synod representative.

### **3.) Women Bishops**

From 1995 to 2007 I was a member of the General Synod staff. Over that time I provided the secretariat for every working party on women bishops and read each of the 2,000 submissions from parishioners. I am the only person in the country, eligible for General Synod, with this experience.

I have attended the annual meetings of the main groups campaigning on this subject: GRAS (Group for the Rescinding of the Act of Synod), WATCH (Women and the Church), Forward in Faith, and I will be attending the forthcoming Reform conference.

I will encourage people to move beyond campaigning from their own 'camp' and instead to seek a deeper appreciation of the views of those with whom they disagree. We need to respect other people's theological integrity. Only then will we find a way to introduce the ordination of women to the episcopate without splitting the Church.

### **Potential Financial Savings**

Some ideas for Church of England financial savings to keep parish share to a minimum.

## **1.) Reduce the number of committees**

In 1997-8 I was a member of staff implementing the report *Working As One Body*, setting up the Archbishops' Council. The report had counted more than 100 committees within the national Church institutions. It recommended moving away from the committee culture to one in which there were time-limited working groups and staff were given the authority to get on with things in between meetings. Improvements came about as a result of the report, though there was a tendency of some committees to just change their name to "task group" so that they would sound more proactive.

What was true for the centre is also true in the dioceses. There is a culture that thinks that if an issue is important, we must have a committee to be responsible for it. I remember a member of General Synod reporting that his diocese had abolished its mission committee, and there had been a storm of protest from people who said 'how dare the mission committee be abolished, mission is the most important duty of a Christian.' However, critics of the scheme were proved wrong, when God showed that He was still able to bring people into His kingdom without the help of a committee! Freed up from having to attend committee meetings, members actually had more time to go out and tell people about Jesus.

To give another example, the General Synod has a Liturgical Commission which has written the many new liturgies that we now have available in *Common Worship*. However, in addition, 30 dioceses each have their own liturgical committees. The terms of reference of the Guildford Diocesan Worship Committee includes "to compose" new forms of service (see the *Diocese of Guildford Directory and Handbook 2009/10*, page 18). There are already a large number of liturgical books and resources published each year, and it is increasingly difficult to have forms of worship in the Church of England that all members have in common. Is it really essential for parish share to pay the administration costs of 30 diocesan committees all writing more liturgies?

## **2.) Reduce the number of General Synod debates**

The General Synod meets for between 8 – 13 days a year. Each Synod day costs the Church many thousands of pounds. In July this year, the Synod published the results of a questionnaire of its members (*Synod: A Self Portrait?* GS Misc 958). Whilst some members wrote that they wanted even more debates in which they could "speak to the nation", another member wrote: "General Synod should be more tightly focused on the legislative business for which it was created, and spend less time on motions which affirm 'motherhood and apple pie', or have no identifiable outcome following the vote."

I agree with the second statement. The Synod often gets carried away with its own sense of self-importance, feeling that if it has a long debate about an issue currently in the news and then passes a resolution "calling on Her Majesty's Government" to do something, then its time has been well spent, and they seem to imagine that the Government will immediately do what the Synod resolution has told it to do. My view is that the General Synod needs to be more realistic in what it can achieve. Some of the 'motherhood and apple pie' motions could be cut, and the number of days on which Synod meets would be reduced, saving the parishes money.

### **3.) Combine diocesan administrations**

The Annual Report of the Archbishops' Council ([GS 1794](#)) reports on paragraph 47 that last year the Dioceses of Portsmouth and Winchester agreed to establish a joint Board of Education. Some dioceses have also been looking at combining some of their back-office functions, such as a single computer system for lay staff payroll. There is scope to save administrative costs by uniting resources and structures with neighbouring dioceses, without having to go the whole hog of merging dioceses.

### **4.) Remove the administration costs of the Mission Development Fund**

The money for the central spending of the Church, on clergy pay and pensions, training for ordination and other national responsibilities, comes partly from the parishes - who contribute through their parish share to the diocese, who then pass the money on to the centre as the diocesan contribution - and partly from the Church Commissioners.

The Archbishops' Council Annual Report states that, in 2009, £28 million came from the dioceses/parishes and £41 million from the Church Commissioners. The Church Commissioners contribution to the centre could have been £5 million more and consequently the parishes contribution £5 less, but instead the Church Commissioners gave £5 million to the dioceses in a "Mission Development Fund" (previously called Parish Mission Fund).

At first sight this mission money sounds excellent, and there are lots of good news stories in the scheme literature giving examples of what this "extra" money has achieved - and of course, lots of great work for mission has been achieved with it.

However, when you look at the big picture, you realise that, although all the official documents refer to it as "extra" money, it isn't really extra money. What is actually happening is that the Church Commissioners are not giving £5 million to the centre; with the result that parish share is £5 million more than it needs to be. How do parishes find this £5 million for parish share? By cutting the amount of money that the parish has for mission. Parishes can then apply to get back the mission funds they lost, by applying for a grant from the Mission Development Fund. However, the full sum is not recovered by the parishes, because of the administrative costs of running the scheme.

I suggest the Commissioners should simply pay the money direct to the centre, and parish contributions to the centre to be reduced by the same amount. Parishes can then use the money they save, from their lower contribution, on mission. This is perfectly possible, and has already been allowed for one diocese. See *The Archbishops' Council 2011 Budget*, GS 1781, paragraph 46: "*As in recent years the apportionment for the Diocese in Europe (estimated to be around £59,000 in 2011 in advance of pooling adjustments) is waived to enable corresponding funds to be available for mission projects as the Diocese is not legally able to receive funds from the Mission Development Fund.*"

## **General Synod Questions**

Every General Synod member is entitled to submit two questions in each session. This gives members the opportunity to seek the release of information, or to raise an issue of concern. I have set out below questions that I intend to submit in the first two sessions, if I am elected.

### **1.) Openness – House of Bishops**

The question I would ask:

“Noting that the content of the apostles’ debates is recorded in the Bible (e.g. Acts 15) rather than simply recording decisions taken. Further noting that the General Synod Code of Practice (GS Misc 955) states, “Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.” What is the wider public interest justification in the full minutes of House of Bishops’ meetings remaining strictly confidential and only a “Summary of Decisions” being published?”

The reason I would ask it:

I remember when I was a keen sixteen year old, asking my vicar if I could observe at a PCC meeting, so that I could see the sort of things that were discussed and how decisions were taken. He refused and explained that the meetings were private because delicate issues were discussed. I remember feeling a bit put out – wasn’t I as much part of that church as the PCC members? Wasn’t openness a key part of the Gospel?

Fourteen years later, for seven years, I was one of the minute takers of House of Bishops’ meetings. The minutes, once checked and approved, were then marked “Strictly Confidential” – for bishops’ eyes only. Then a short, bland, “Summary of Decisions” was written, and it is that document which is made available.

Whilst bishops should be able to meet in private, so that they can speak freely to one another, not having to guard every word in case it is misreported. Also, in any meeting, the content of some discussions must always remain confidential, such as discussion of a pastoral problem of a named individual. However, the House of Bishops minutes do not record discussion of private details about individuals. They record the discussion of the arguments for and against different policy options. Church members should be allowed to read the content of those discussions, not merely informed of the final decision – it is our Church too.

### **2.) Openness – Staff costs**

The question I would ask:

“Noting the Archbishops’ Council Annual Report (page 34) and the Church Commissioners’ Annual Report (page 39) records that 29 members of staff from the two organisations each earn salaries in excess of £60,000. Further noting that Her Majesty’s Government has increased its own level of openness, by publishing the

names and job titles of all special advisers earning more than £58,200; and the name, grade, job title and salary of every civil servant who is paid more than the Prime Minister. Will the Archbishops' Council, Church Commissioners, Pensions Board, Lambeth Palace and Bishopthorpe, publish the job titles and salaries of staff who earn more than the Archbishop of Canterbury?"

The reason I would ask it:

On the one hand, staff at Church House have suffered badly in recent years, with salary freezes, pensions benefits reduced and jobs cut. I myself left the employ of Church House when our third child was on the way for a better paying job. However, at the other end of the scale, one Church House post pays a salary in excess of £100,000, and the priests who are the Directors of Mission and Ministry are probably each on salaries in excess of the Archbishop of Canterbury. It may be right that a priest under the Archbishop of Canterbury is paid more than he is, but we should have the information.

### **3.) Finances - Conference of European Churches**

The question I would ask:

"Noting that in January 2009 the Church of England and partner Churches made a submission to the Conference of European Churches, which, in paragraph 28, criticised the CEC strategy which was to "propose a long list of thematic issues to satisfy Member Churches' agendas, but to keep these issues as vague and as undefined as possible." Further noting that the response of the CEC in July 2009 was that its Central Committee would bring forward recommendations in 2013. While the Church of England awaits the possibility of improvement beginning sometime after 2013, is the Archbishops' Council satisfied that the increase in financial contribution from the Church of England to the CEC, agreed in the 2011 Archbishops' Council budget (GS 1781, page 49), will be money well spent?"

The reason I would ask it:

In July, the General Synod approved, for 2011, a 2% increase in the Church of England's contribution to the Conference of European Churches (CEC) to £85,700 (see <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/about/gensynod/agendas/july2010/gspapers/gs1781.pdf>)

The General Synod sends representatives to the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and worthy speeches are made and worthy reports are written, but I can't think of a single CEC debate or report that has had a real impact on the life of the Church of England, or any other Church.

The Church of England's submission ([http://assembly.ceceurope.org/uploads/media/Joint\\_UK\\_Church\\_Response\\_to\\_Lyon.pdf](http://assembly.ceceurope.org/uploads/media/Joint_UK_Church_Response_to_Lyon.pdf)) recommended various changes that could make the CEC a useful organisation – such as alerting members to draft European legislation that Churches might want to

lobby about. The CEC has set up a working group to look into the suggestions received. They will consult again and bring back recommendations in 2013. In the meantime we are increasing our financial contribution (which comes from parish share) to an ineffective organisation, while awaiting improvements that may never come.

#### **4.) Finances - Church Commissioners' Mission Development Fund**

The question I would ask:

“If, the Church Commissioners closed the Mission Development Fund and instead paid the money direct to the Archbishops' Council's budget, thereby reducing parish share, resulting in every parish having more money to spend on their mission. What would be the financial savings to the Church by eliminating the administrative cost of: the Church Commissioners and dioceses running the scheme; and the time involved in parishes applying for grants?”

The reason I would ask it:

See my explanation on my Financial Savings page.