

21 September 2010 - Adrian Vincent's hustings speech

I attended the General Synod hustings for the Diocese of Guildford this evening. Seven of the eight of us candidates were there. It was attended by 25 of the 400 deanery synod members of the diocese.

Each candidate had to give a maximum 3 minute introductory speech. My speech was:

"I worked at Church House, Westminster for 12 years as a member of staff of General Synod, so I have knowledge of how the system works from the inside, which should help me if I am elected as a General Synod member.

In the mailing that I sent to all Deanery Synod members last month, I gave four examples where financial savings might be made in the administration of the Church, to keep parish share increases to a minimum.

I also mentioned my experience of the work to permit the ordination of women to the episcopate.

The majority of the Church of England wants women bishops, but the majority *also* want to introduce the change in a way that doesn't force out traditionalists.

I think one reason why the process has taken so long, and why we have still don't have a proposal that all sides support, is the lack of real dialogue between the parties. I have attended the meetings of WATCH (Women And The Church) and Forward in Faith. I have never seen a Forward in Faith member attend a WATCH meeting to seek to understand their views; and I have never seen a WATCH member attend a Forward in Faith meeting to seek to understand their views. To find a way to remain as one Church, we need to talk to those in the Church with different views from our own.

Finally, last week I took the week off work and went round visiting more than 60 Deanery Synod members in my local area. I am grateful that everyone who was in welcomed me, and that no one sent me packing!

In chatting to members I sensed two themes in particular. One was that most were disengaged from the national Church. This is not surprising, because people have got better things to do than to constantly track the goings-on of the General Synod. But it illustrates how little of what happens in the Synod trickles down to the deaneries and parishes.

The other thing was that some, who *had* tried to engage, had become disillusioned. For example, they spoke of joining *Diocesan* Synod so that they could help to shape the direction of the diocese, only to find that the Standing Committee or Bishops' Council had already made the policy decisions and they were only being asked to rubber stamp them.

I don't have a simple answer, but I want to play my part in my own behaviour. Before each General Synod meeting I will put on my website the issues coming up for debate and invite you to send me your views, and after each meeting I will publish how I voted on each issue and why. I hope this would be a small step in improving a culture of openness and participation that I feel is so important."

After the speeches were questions from deanery synod members. The questions were:

- Women bishops (2 questions);
- Whether it was right to decide the direction of the Church by majority vote?
- Noting the success of the Pope's visit, did we think the CofE should follow his example in not pandering to the latest fad?
- What do we think of deaneries – do we agree that they should be the powerhouse where the grass roots feeds up into General Synod rather than just receiving reports from General Synod members?
- Whether clergy should have more training in evangelism?
- Homosexuality: would we be concerned if our parish priest was living with a partner with whom they were not married?
- How we can get the next generation of young people into Church and onto General Synod.

I felt that all my fellow candidates answered all the questions well, and I very much enjoyed the evening and am grateful to those who organised it and to those who came.