

Guildford Diocesan Synod: 6 November 2010

Report by Adrian Vincent

The Diocesan Synod were asked to approve the Budget for 2011. It proposed a 1.7% increase in Parish Share, partly to cover the increased costs in clergy training and partly because the Diocese wanted to be able to pay the clergy of our Diocese a 2.5% stipend increase (following a 0% increase in 2010). The subject was down on the Agenda “for debate” and I came with the below speech prepared. However, on the day there was only the opportunity to ask questions, so what I said at the Synod was less than what is reproduced below:

“I’m Adrian Vincent, a newly elected lay member of the General Synod. The job comes with it membership of the Diocesan Synod and so this is my first meeting as a member of the Diocesan Synod. Any sensible person would not try to make a speech at their first meeting because you don’t know the background to the issues and you are likely to make a fool of yourself. However, General Synod members love the sound of their own voice - and I am no exception!

The 2011 budget paper proposes making provision to be able to pay a 2.5% increase in Guildford Diocesan clergy stipends. What the paper omits to mention is that the Diocese actually has the benefit of guidance from a national Church body called the Central Stipends Authority. They analyse the different costs of living across the country and recommend a stipend figure for each diocese accordingly. So, for example, the recommended stipend for the Blackburn Diocese is lower than the recommended stipend for the London Diocese.

The Report is available on the Church of England website

<http://www.cofe.anglican.org/about/gensynod/agendas/feb2010/gsmisc/gsmisc932.pdf> and page 8 asks dioceses to pay the recommend amount, or a couple of percentage points either way.

Page 9 shows the stipends that dioceses actually paid in 2009, and most dioceses were within a couple of percent of their recommended figure.

I welcome that, because, just as the quote says, “no man is an island” so, ‘no diocese is an island’ either (except the Diocese of Sodor and Man, which is a literal island!). The big exception in the figures was the Guildford diocese, who paid a stipend 7.5% higher than the recommended figure. The result was that, in 2009, Guildford clergy were paid 10% more than London clergy. Does it really cost 10% more to live in Guildford than it does to live in London?

The stipend freeze in 2010 means that this year we are paying 6% more than the recommended figure for the diocese. I believe our stipend is still substantially higher than any other diocese in the country. We are now being asked to approve an increase of Parish Share of 1.7% in order to fund a further stipend increase of 2.5%.

If it was only my money I was spending in this decision, I would say yes of course. But Parish Share isn’t only my money; by voting to increase Parish Share I am also asking the thousands of people who are likely to be made redundant next year as a result of Government spending cuts, to pay 1.7% more.

I would have been happier with a parish share increase of not more than 1% and a clergy stipend increase of about 1.5%”

The Diocesan Secretary, Stephen Marriott replied that several years ago the Guildford Diocese had decided to pay a higher stipend than other dioceses in order to set a lead to the rest of the Church of England. Later, the Church of England’s 2001 report “Generosity and Sacrifice”

http://www.cofe.anglican.org/news/report_recommends_higher_and_redefined_stipends.html and available here: <http://www.chbookshop.co.uk/product.asp?id=9561> had recommended increasing stipends. The General Synod had originally approved the increased stipend aspiration in the Report, which supported Guildford's line, but later decided it wasn't currently affordable. Consequently Guildford Diocese stands out as paying a higher stipend and there is no mood in the Diocese to change that.

Canon Robert Cotton added that the original decision by the Diocese to increase the stipend above national guidelines had been taken following a diocesan survey of clergy debt, so it had been a fact-based decision.

The Bishop of Guildford added that although the 2009 figures show that Guildford clergy were paid 10% more than London clergy, the picture was more complicated. For example London clergy in the City and in Camden each received a supplementary sum from historic trusts and this was not recorded in the published table.

After some more questions, the budget was put to the vote and was overwhelmingly carried.

I abstained because:

On the one hand, I disagree with the Diocese rejecting national guidelines. If the national guideline figure for Guildford clergy is too low, it is also too low for clergy in other dioceses. The proper course is therefore for the Diocese to submit a Diocesan Synod Motion to the General Synod, calling for the national guideline figures to be increased. That way we will have done some good for all clergy in the Church of England, rather than ignoring the national Church and doing our own thing.

On the other hand, the Diocese consulted widely on the 2011 budget and listened, reducing its original proposal of a 3.5% Parish Share increase to 1.7%, and that is to be welcomed.