

Woking Deanery Synod: 25 January 2011

Report by Adrian Vincent

I attended the Woking Deanery Synod meeting and reported on the November 2010 General Synod, what would be happening at the February 2011 General Synod and what issues were to be coming to the Diocesan and Deanery Synods.

Attached is a copy of my Report handout.

Woking Deanery Synod Meeting, 25 January 2011

General Synod Report: Adrian Vincent

- 1.) **Your General Synod representatives** page 2

- 2.) **What is happening at the General Synod**
 - a.) **The November 2010 General Synod**
 - i.) Official report from the Church of England's website page 2
 - ii.) Personal report from Adrian Vincent's website page 4
 - b.) **The February 2011 General Synod** page 5

- 3.) **What is coming your way**
 - a.) **Women Bishops**
 - i.) Background page 7
 - ii.) Next steps: Debate in the Guildford Diocese page 9
 - iii.) My views page 10
 - iv.) Further reading page 10
 - b.) **The Anglican Covenant**
 - i.) Official report from the Church of England's website page 12
 - ii.) My views page 13
 - iii.) Further reading page 16

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1.) Your General Synod representatives

http://www.cofeguildford.org.uk/downloads/aboutus/synod/general_synod_membership.pdf

House of Bishops

The Rt Revd Christopher John Hill

House of Clergy

Ven Julian Henderson, Archdeacon of Dorking

Revd Canon Robert Cotton, Rector of Holy Trinity and St Mary, Guildford

Revd Barbara Messham, Vicar of All Saints, Guildford

Revd Dr Philip Plyming, Vicar of Claygate

Canon Dr Hazel Whitehead, Diocesan Director of Ministerial Training

House of Laity

Canon Peter Bruinvels, Dorking Deanery

Mr Keith Malcouronne, Runnymede Deanery

Mrs Anne Martin, Godalming Deanery

Mr Adrian Vincent, Woking Deanery

2.) What is happening at the General Synod

a.) The November 2010 General Synod

i.) Official report from the Church of England's website

www.churchofengland.org/about-us/structure/general-synod/agendas-and-papers/november-2010-group-of-sessions.aspx

“New Synod debates the Big Society and the Anglican Communion Covenant

Her Majesty The Queen inaugurated the Ninth General Synod of the Church of England in Church House, Westminster on Tuesday 23 November.

The Inauguration ceremony followed a celebration of the Eucharist in Westminster Abbey, at which the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, presided and Dame Mary Tanner (a President of the World Council of Churches) preached.

This Synod reflected some significant changes amongst its membership: 35% of the elected members of the General Synod were starting their first ever five-year term; the proportion of elected clergy who are female has increased from 21% to 28%; and women now make up 46% of the elected laity membership (up from 40%). Both newly elected and returning Synod members had attended an induction seminar in Church House on the Monday.

In her address, Her Majesty described the opening of a new Synod as a moment both for giving thanks for the witness of those who had gone before, and for praying for wisdom in seeking to balance change and continuity in the decisions lying ahead.

The Queen emphasised the importance of two forthcoming anniversaries: four hundred years since the publication of the Authorised Version of the Bible commissioned by King James,

and two hundred years since the foundation of the National Society for Promoting Religious Education, both of which had had a lasting impact on the life of the Church and the nation.

The November group of sessions continued with regular business in the afternoon of Tuesday 23 November, until late afternoon on Wednesday 24 November. In his first Presidential Address to the new Synod, the Archbishop of Canterbury reflected on issues coming to the Synod, including the Anglican Communion Covenant and the Big Society, and for the need for a process of listening, engagement and theological debate.

The Big Society

The Big Society is a major theme of the new Government and is of considerable relevance to the role of religious bodies, including the Church of England. In June, the Bishop of Leicester sponsored a debate in the House of Lords on the concept of the Big Society. The Mission and Public Affairs Division has been in discussion with Government ministers to consider ways the Church might work in partnership with the Government to promote greater social cohesion.

The debate in Synod was intended to enable the Church to understand the issues concerned more deeply and prepare dioceses and parishes to feel better equipped to respond at local level.

Anglican Communion Covenant

The idea of an Anglican Communion Covenant was first proposed in the Windsor report of 2004, following developments in relation to same-sex partnerships in North America. It was envisaged that the Anglican Covenant would “make explicit and forceful the loyalty and bonds of affection” which govern the relationships between the Churches of the Anglican Communion. A text of the Covenant was sent last December to all the Churches of the Anglican Communion for their approval.

The House of Bishops agreed in May to commend the Covenant to the Synod for adoption. Synod formally considered the Covenant before referring it to dioceses for consideration by the diocesan synods. The draft Act of Synod will return to the Synod in due course for Final Approval, possibly in 2012.

Other Legislative Business

The Church of England Marriage (Amendment) Measure was introduced at the November group of sessions to give effect to the resolution passed by the Synod in July, calling for the introduction of legislation to enable a diocesan bishop to give directions allowing those who have a ‘qualifying connection’ with a particular parish to marry in any church within the benefice of which that parish forms a part.

Two other pieces of legislation came to the Synod for approval as the remaining steps in the process of preparing for the introduction of ‘Common Tenure’ early in 2011.

Background papers for each debate, alongside links to an audio archive of each session, are available at: <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/about/gensynod/agendas/nov2010/index.html>”

ii.) Personal report from Adrian Vincent's website

www.adrianvincent.org.uk/agenda.html

Before the November meeting I put on my website an outline of my views on the issues to be debated and invited anyone who wanted to send me their views prior to the meeting. After the meeting I reported on my website as follows:

“After General Synod November 2010: how I voted and why.

On the Big Society:

I voted to “take note” of the Report on the Big Society. This was for the reasons set out in my comments on the paper before the meeting

[www.adrianvincent.org.uk/big society.html]. The motion was passed.

I voted for the following motion to “...undertake a feasibility study with benefactor funding...[to] prepare business templates for various options which could be used by dioceses and others who choose to make such partnerships a reality in their local area...” This was because a study that will cost the Church nothing, that could bring new ideas for local partnerships as part of the ‘Big Society’ idea, can’t be bad. The motion was passed.

On the Anglican Covenant:

I voted “That the draft Act of Synod adopting the Anglican Communion Covenant be considered.” This was for the reasons set out in my comments on the paper before the meeting [www.adrianvincent.org.uk/anglican covenant.html]. The motion was passed.

I voted against amendments which would have changed the text of the Covenant. This is because after several revisions, the text is now in its final form and all Anglican Provinces are asked to either adopt it or not - it is too late to monkey around with the text. The amendments were lost.

I voted against the amendment which would have delayed sending the document to Dioceses for debate. This was for the reasons set out in my comments on the paper before the meeting - that I feel the Covenant probably already comes too late, so further delay will only make things worse. The amendment was lost.

The result is that the text of the Anglican Covenant is going to Dioceses for debate, and if approved by them, it will then come back to General Synod for final approval.

On the Ecclesiastical Offices (Terms of Service) (Amendment) (No 2) Regulations 2010 (GS 1806).

On the Ecclesiastical Offices (Terms of Service) (Consequential and Transitional Provisions) Order 2010(GS 1807).

This were technical legal matters which are explained in the explanatory memorandums on the Church of England website. I voted for them and they were passed.

On the Draft Church of England Marriage (Amendment) Measure (GS 1805)

These were essentially a legal tidying-up exercise. I voted in favour and they were approved for the next stage, which is consideration by a Revision Committee.

Click this link for the questions I asked at the Synod and the answers that I received:
www.adrianvincent.org.uk/novsynodquestions.html”

b.) The February 2011 General Synod

The full Agenda and Papers are published on the Church of England website:
www.churchofengland.org/about-us/structure/general-synod/agendas-and-papers/february-2011-group-of-sessions.aspx

The following (edited) summary is also on that page of the website:

“Secretary of State for International Development to address the Synod.

The Secretary of State for International Development, the Rt Hon Andrew Mitchell, will address the Synod on the scope for greater collaboration between Government and the Church on the Millennium Development Goal of partnerships for development. This will also link in with the Big Society debate at the November Synod.

The General Synod will meet at Church House from 3.00 pm on Monday 7 February until mid-afternoon Wednesday 9 February.

Plans for the quinquennium

Synod will debate a strategic report from the Archbishops' Council and the House of Bishops looking at the opportunities and challenges facing the Church of England over the next five years and how work done at national level can support dioceses and parishes in meeting them.

Anglican-Roman Catholic relations

The report from the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC): Mary - Grace and Hope in Christ, published in 2005, is the last of the second series of ARCIC reports to come to the General Synod for debate (the decision to initiate a third series of ARCIC studies was announced last year).

The motion from the Council for Christian Unity welcomes the dialogue between the two churches; notes the strengths and weaknesses of the ARCIC report and the areas for further work identified in the briefing paper from the Faith and Order Advisory Group; and encourages study of the report.

The debate will be preceded by a presentation by the Bishop of Guildford, Rt Rev Christopher Hill, (Chair of the CCU) and Bishop George Stack, on behalf of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.

Clergy Discipline

The focus of the legislative business at this Synod is clergy discipline. In July 2009, the Synod passed a motion on this subject from the London Diocesan Synod and, in the following year, the Clergy Discipline Commission assessed what changes might be needed to the Clergy Discipline Measure 2003 in the light of experience over the last seven years. The Commission's recommendations, which do not involve fundamental changes to the existing legislation, now come before the Synod by way

of draft amending legislation for first consideration. The Clergy Discipline Commission is also bringing to the Synod some changes to the Code of Practice under the 2003 Measure.

One additional proposed change to the legislation results from a motion passed by the Synod in February 2009 and would allow disciplinary proceedings to be brought against clergy who support organisations which have aims that are inconsistent with the Church's teaching on race equality.

Parochial Fees Policy

Last year, Synod gave final approval to new legislation (which is now completing its parliamentary stages). The legal framework for setting fees will in future be significantly different and before the Archbishops' Council draws up the first Fees Order under the new legislation the Council has decided that the new Synod should have a general debate about principles and their practical outworking.

Baptism Services

The motion from the Liverpool Diocesan Synod asks for additional texts to be prepared as alternatives for passages in the Common Worship Baptism Services, which would be expressed in more culturally appropriate and accessible language than is perceived to be the case with the present services.

Marriage after Divorce and the Ordained Ministry

This provides the opportunity for a take note debate on the House of Bishops' statement on Marriage after Divorce and the Ordained Ministry which was issued in June. The statement clarified the position on a number of matters including the possible appointment of bishops who may have married again after divorce or have married someone who has been divorced.

Other business

There will be a Presidential Address by the Archbishop of York; and a celebration of Holy Communion at which the Archbishop of Canterbury will preside and preach.

The Business Committee has also scheduled for debate the following motion from Mr John Ward that was not debated at the November Synod during the discussions on the Anglican Communion Covenant, for lack of time. The motion seeks to specify two-thirds majorities (rather than simple majorities) in the House of Bishops, the House of Clergy and the House of Laity at the Final Approval Stage for the draft Act of Synod adopting the Anglican Communion Covenant. The Covenant was referred to dioceses in December and is expected to return to the General Synod in 2012.

There will be two presentations: on ethical investment policy, from the Ethical Investment Advisory Group; and on the Weddings Project...”

3.) What is coming your way

a.) Women Bishops

i.) Background

The Church of England website gives a summary of the history of the debate from 1975-2010 www.churchofengland.org/our-views/women-bishops.aspx

The following is an edited extract:

“...in July 2006, [General Synod] passed motions as follows:

'That this Synod welcome and affirm the view of the majority of the House of Bishops that admitting women to the episcopate in the Church of England is consonant with the faith of the Church as the Church of England has received it and would be a proper development in proclaiming afresh in this generation the grace and truth of Christ.'

'That this Synod, endorsing Resolution 111.2 of the Lambeth Conference 1998 "that those who dissent from, as well as those who assent to the ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopate are both loyal Anglicans" and believing that the implications of admitting women to the episcopate will best be discerned by continuing to explore in detail the practical and legislative arrangements:

(a) invite dioceses, deaneries and parishes to continue serious debate and reflection on the theological, practical, ecumenical and missiological aspects of the issue;

(b) invite the Archbishops' Council, in consultation with the Standing Committee of the House of Bishops and the Appointments Committee, to secure the early appointment of a legislative drafting group, which will aim to include a significant representation of women in the spirit of Resolution 13/31 of the Anglican Consultative Council passed in July 2005, charged with:

(i) preparing the draft measure and amending canon necessary to remove the legal obstacles to the consecration of women to the office of bishop;

(ii) preparing a draft of possible additional legal provision consistent with Canon A4 to establish arrangements that would seek to maintain the highest possible degree of communion with those conscientiously unable to receive the ministry of women bishops;

(iii) submitting the results of its work to the House of Bishops for consideration and submission to Synod; and

(c) instruct the Business Committee to make time available, before first consideration of the draft legislation, for the Synod to consider, in the light of any views expressed by the House of Bishops, the arrangements proposed in the drafting group's report.'

...In July 2008, General Synod called for legislation to be drafted in line with the motion:

'That this Synod:

(a) affirm that the wish of its majority is for women to be admitted to the episcopate;

(b) affirm its view that special arrangements be available, within the existing structures of the Church of England, for those who as a matter of theological conviction will not be able to receive the ministry of women as bishops or priests;

(c) affirm that these should be contained in a statutory national code of practice to which all concerned would be required to have regard; and

(d) instruct the legislative drafting group, in consultation with the House of Bishops, to complete its work accordingly, including preparing the first draft of a code of practice, so that the Business Committee can include first consideration of the draft legislation in the agenda for the February 2009 group of sessions.'

A further report from the Manchester Group (GS 1707) and the draft legislation, together with an illustrative code of practice, were published in December 2008. General Synod debated the draft legislation in February 2009, sending it to a Revision Committee that was set up in March of that year. ...The legislation, in the form of a draft Measure, was published May 2010.

...In July 2010, the Synod left the draft legislation largely unamended. In September 2010, the draft legislation was referred to the dioceses for debate and vote.

...If a majority of Diocesan Synods approve the draft legislation, it will return to the General Synod (probably in February 2012) for Final Drafting. The Final Approval stage, at which two-thirds majorities are required in each House, could be reached in July 2012. If approved, the legislation would then go to Parliament for consideration by the Ecclesiastical Committee and each House of Parliament.

The draft Measure requires the House of Bishops to draw up a code of practice (which is not subject to the diocesan reference procedure). This cannot be formally drawn up or laid before the Synod for approval until after the legislation has received Royal Assent. But an initial illustrative draft code was prepared by the legislative drafting group in 2009 and in the light of changes subsequently made to the draft legislation the House of Bishops has accepted the recommendation of the Revision Committee that further work on a draft code should proceed, rather than waiting for the various legislative stages to be completed. A House of Bishops working party on the Code of Practice (chaired by the Bishop of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich) started work in November 2010 with a view to enabling the House of Bishops and the General Synod to engage further with the shape of a draft code before the draft legislation reaches the Final Approval stage."

ii.) Next steps: Debate in the Guildford Diocese

Article 8 of the Constitution of the General Synod provides that certain kinds of legislation may not receive the final approval of the General Synod unless they have first been approved by the majority of Church of England diocesan synods. The Article 8 process regarding women bishops is outlined and explained in a note from the Business Committee of the General Synod GS Misc 964. www.churchofengland.org/media/1121482/gsmisc964.pdf
Extract:

“...CONSIDERATION BY DEANERY SYNODS

11. The Standing Orders of the General Synod state that in relation to Article 8 references ‘a diocesan synod shall not be required or forbidden to consult any other body in the diocese before voting on any matter referred.’ It is, therefore, for each diocese to come to its own view about wider consultation before the diocesan synod takes its decision. The Business Committee strongly encourages dioceses to consult the deanery synods. Any votes taken by deanery synods are not formally part of the reference process.”

In October 2010, the following email was sent from the Guildford Diocesan Secretary, Stephen Marriott. Extract:

“This message is sent to PCC Secretaries and Incumbents, Deanery Secretaries, Lay Chairs and Rural Deans. cc Diocesan Synod

...I have received an “Article 8 reference” from General Synod. There is an explanation of this and the process in the attachment “GS Misc 964”. In a nutshell as part of the process each Diocese is obliged by General Synod to debate a motion on Women in the Episcopate (the wording is set out in para 4 of GS misc 964 – we cannot amend it.) We intend to hold our debate at the June 2011 meeting.

The Diocesan Synod is not obliged to consult deaneries or PCCs, but this is an invitation for PCC and Deaneries to hold a debate if you wish. The Diocesan Business Planning Group hopes that at least each deanery will be able to hold a debate/discussion in time to feed views into the Diocesan Synod debate on June 25th 2011. Deanery Secretaries – I would be grateful to have your input by mid MAY 2011 so as to be able to include them with the papers for Synod.

Deanery Secretaries – please can you contact your PCCs with any timing constraints, if you wish to know of your PCCs’ views prior to a deanery discussion.

PCC and Deanery Secretaries – When you have had a moment to consider when/if/how you wish to handle this at a local level, if you wish to have support from Diocesan House – e.g. by asking us to use our sizable photocopiers to print attachments off for you, please do get in contact with us. You are free to structure your discussions as you wish – a light touch affirmation of a well established position, or a detailed paper supported major debate...”

iii.) My views

Prior to my election to General Synod, I put my views on my website:
www.adrianvincent.org.uk/news6sept2010.html

“...The Church of England...has ordained women to the priesthood whilst at the same time stating that those who, in conscience, disagree with the decision are "loyal Anglicans" and the CofE is officially in a process of "reception" until there is a consensus in the universal Church.

The General Synod has passed resolutions that legislation should be introduced to permit the ordination of women to the episcopate, but it has also passed resolutions that those who disagree with this decision should have provisions made for them that will enable them in conscience to remain within the CofE.

At the July meeting of the General Synod, the two Archbishops proposed an amendment to the draft legislation that they felt would have enabled those opposed to remain within the CofE, by providing "coordinate jurisdiction". In short, parishes opposed to the ordination of women to the episcopate, who were in a diocese where a woman was the diocesan bishop could be under the joint authority of that bishop and a male bishop.

The voting on the Archbishops' amendment was:

Bishops: 25 for, 15 against.

Clergy: 85 for, 90 against, 5 abstentions.

Laity: 106 in favour, 86 against, 4 abstentions.

Although 216 voted in favour and 191 voted against, it needed a majority of each 'House' to pass and because it was lost in the House of Clergy, the amendment was lost and it was not introduced.

When the legislation comes to be debated in Diocesan Synods (which is the next stage) my preference would be for the Guildford Diocesan Synod to propose a 'following motion' which asks the General Synod to insert the Archbishops' amendment into the legislation when it goes back to General Synod.”

In short, my view is that the majority in the Church of England are in favour of the ordination of women to the episcopate, but want it to be done in a way that doesn't force out traditionalists. Traditionalists clearly set out the minimum provisions needed to enable them to stay in the CofE (see below). The current draft of the legislation does not include those minimum provisions. Therefore I will not vote in favour of the draft legislation in its current form.

iv.) Further reading

In addition to reading the text of the draft legislation itself that has been referred to dioceses:
www.churchofengland.org/about-us/structure/general-synod/about-general-synod/references-to-dioceses.aspx

The following publications set out the arguments on the issues:

- 1.) *“Women Bishops in the Church of England?”* Church House Publishing, 2004, ISBN 0 7151 4037 X

This is the official CofE report (289 pages), which sets out all the arguments for and against. It is sometimes called ‘The Rochester Report’ after the Bishop of Rochester who chaired the working party that wrote it [I took the minutes for that working party in the days when I was a member of staff at Church House, Westminster].

2.) “*Consecrated Women*” edited by Jonathan Baker, Canterbury Press, 2004, ISBN 1 85311 509 6

This is the main report (291 pages) from traditionalist group Forward in Faith. It sets out the traditionalist arguments against the ordination of women to the episcopate and then sets out what provisions traditionalists need to enable them to remain within the CofE if women are ordained to the episcopate.

3.) “*Women Bishops?*” John Pitchford, Tufton Books, 2008. ISBN 978 0 85191 323 0

An easy read booklet of 42 pages setting out the traditionalist arguments against the ordination of women to the episcopate – handy for those who don’t have time to read “*Consecrated Women*”.

4.) “*The Call for Women Bishops*” edited by Harriet Harris and Jane Shaw, SPCK, 2004. ISBN 0281 05621 8

This is the main report (196 pages) of essays putting the case in favour, mainly from members of Women and the Church (WATCH).

5.) “*Women as Bishops*” edited by James Rigney, Mowbray, 2008. ISBN 978 0 567 03224 9

This is the main report (200 pages) of essays from the group Affirming Catholicism, in favour of the ordination of women. (It was previously published in 2006 under the title “Women and the Episcopate: Affirming Catholicism – the Journal”).

6.) “*Countering the Claims of Evangelical Feminism: Biblical Responses to the Key Questions*” Wayne Grudem, Multnomah Publishers, 2006. ISBN 1 59052 518 3

Sets out the conservative evangelical position. The back cover states, “Wayne Grudem offers more than forty biblical responses...showing God’s equal value in men and women and why their roles are complementary, not interchangeable.” (314 pages).

Books 1, 2, 4 and 5 are available from Church House Bookshop, 31 Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BN, Tel. 020 7799 4064 www.chbookshop.co.uk

Book 3 is available from www.additionalcurates.co.uk/churchunion5.html

Book 6 is available from www.amazon.co.uk

b.) The Anglican Covenant

i.) Official report from the Church of England's website

The Article 8 process regarding the adoption of the Anglican Communion Covenant is set out and explained in a note from the Business Committee of the General Synod (GS Misc 971) www.churchofengland.org/media/1161076/gsmisc971.pdf

Extract:

“INTRODUCTION

...4. On the instructions of the Business Committee of the General Synod, we are circulating the following documents under cover of this note:

- (a) The text of the draft Act of Synod adopting the Anglican Communion Covenant.
- (b) A background paper from the Faith and Order Commission prepared for the General Synod in November. This includes material on the history of the Anglican Communion Covenant, a summary of its content, some answers to frequently asked questions and the full text of the Covenant.
- (c) A copy of the response form which diocesan secretaries need to send the Clerk to the Synod recording the diocesan decision. The responses need to reach the Clerk before 5pm on Monday 30 April 2012.

... ACTION BY DIOCESAN SYNODS

11. In considering the draft Act of Synod diocesan synods will, no doubt, wish to consider both the issues of principle that lie behind what is proposed and the way in which those principles are given effect in the specific provisions of the Anglican Communion Covenant. The issue for each diocese is whether it is willing to give its approval to the draft Act of Synod in the form in which it has been referred to it by the General Synod.

12. For the purposes of Article 8, the General Synod needs, therefore, to have from each diocese a clear decision, taken at a meeting of the diocesan synod, on whether that synod approves the draft Act of Synod. Each diocesan synod is, therefore, asked to consider a motion in the following terms:

‘That this Synod approve the draft Act of Synod adopting the Anglican Communion Covenant.’

...CONSIDERATION BY DEANERY SYNODS

19. The Standing Orders of the General Synod state that in relation to Article 8 references “a diocesan synod shall not be required or forbidden to consult any other body in the diocese before voting on any matter referred.” It is, therefore, for each diocese to come to its own view about wider consultation before the diocesan synod takes its decision. The Business Committee encourages dioceses to consult the deanery synods. Any votes taken by deanery synods are not formally part of the reference process.

...DISCUSSION MATERIAL

20. The Business Committee suggests that diocesan synod members should be given copies, electronically or in hard copy, of this note, the draft Act of Synod and the background note from the Faith and Order Commission (which includes the text of the Covenant).

... FUTURE PROCESS

21. If a majority of dioceses approve the draft Act of Synod, it will return to the General Synod for consideration in accordance with the requirements of Article 7 of the Constitution (involving a reference to the House of Bishops and, if required by any of them, references to the Convocations and the House of Laity). Subject to the outcome of the Article 7 procedure, the Synod would then be invited finally to approve the draft Act of Synod.”

ii.) My views

I published my views on this subject on my website, prior to the November Synod debate: www.adrianvincent.org.uk/anglicancovenant.html

Extract:

“This process began in 2003 after a bishop in the Anglican Church of Canada authorised a public Rite of Blessing for same sex unions; and The Episcopal Church (USA) consecrated as a bishop “a divorced man openly acknowledged to be living in a sexually active and committed same sex relationship” (The Windsor Report 2004, paragraph 27). Both these actions took place against the request and resolutions of what are called ‘the four instruments of unity’ of the Anglican Communion: the Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Consultative Council, the Primates’ Meeting, and the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Some traditionalist Provinces reacted to these actions of the liberal Provinces:

“...Some Archbishops from elsewhere in the Communion have...entered parts of the Episcopal Church (USA) and the Anglican Church of Canada and exercised episcopal functions without the consent of the relevant diocesan bishop...all these developments have now contributed materially to a tit-for-tat stand-off in which, tragically in line with analogous political disasters in the wider world, each side now accuses the other of atrocities, and blames the other for the need to react further in turn.” (The Windsor Report 2004, paragraphs 29-30).

The Anglican Church did what it always does in a crisis. It set up a committee to write a report. This was The Windsor Report, it is a good and significant report that is well worth reading. It can be bought as a book (ISBN 6-00000005-7), and is also on-line: <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/windsor2004/index.cfm>

The committee was called ‘The Lambeth Commission’ and they were asked, among other things,

“...to make recommendations to the Primates and the Anglican Consultative Council, as to the exceptional circumstances and conditions under which, and the means by which, it would be appropriate for the Archbishop of Canterbury to exercise an extraordinary ministry of episcopate (pastoral oversight), support and reconciliation with regard to the internal affairs of a province other than his own for the sake of maintaining communion with the said province and between the said province and the rest of the Anglican Communion.” (The Windsor Report 2004, paragraph 3).

The Commission were under massive pressure to report quickly, particularly by the Provinces of ‘the Global South’ who were fed up with what they considered to be

being fobbed-off for years by new commissions and reports being written and no action ever being taken to discipline liberal provinces whom they considered had departed from Scripture. They said they weren't prepared to wait much longer

The Commission reported relatively quickly and recommended:

“...the adoption by the churches of the Communion of a common Anglican Covenant which would make explicit and forceful the loyalty and bonds of affection which govern the relationships between the churches of the Communion. The Covenant could deal with: the acknowledgement of common identity; the relationships of communion; the commitments of communion; the exercise of autonomy in communion; and the management of communion affairs (including disputes). A possible draft appears in Appendix Two.” (The Windsor Report 2004, paragraph 118).

When I read this paragraph in 2004 I wrote in the margin, “but what if they pass this document and then ignore it – taking unilateral action on communion wide issues. Is it enforceable? Later in the paragraph the answer is no – no binding authority, so is it worth the paper it's written on?”

Six years and several drafts later, we now have the final text of the Covenant which we are asked to approve. I can't help thinking that this is too little too late.

Too late, because in the last few years the breaches on both sides have continued and the Provinces of the Global South have largely given up on the Anglican Communion ever taking effective action and have set up their own body “GAFCON” <http://www.gafcon.org/> a “fellowship of confessing Anglicans”. More than 200 bishops chose not to attend the 2008 Lambeth Conference, and instead met in Jerusalem and produced their own statement of faith, “The Jerusalem Declaration” http://fca.net/resources/the_jerusalem_declaration/
A parallel, traditionalist, Anglican Church in North America has also been formed <http://www.anglicanchurch.net/?/main/page/about#history>

Too little? Some actually say it is too much. For example, groups such as Inclusive Church and Modern Church (MCU) object to the Covenant, saying that it would make the Anglican Church more centralised, authoritarian, restrict diversity and stifle developments from the Holy Spirit. <http://www.inclusivechurch2.net/Anglican-Covenant-and-Communion-755dd12>

I disagree, let's look at what the text of the Covenant actually says (Annex 1 of GS Misc 966) <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/about/gensynod/agendas/nov2010/gsmisc966.pdf>

1.) It assumes a starting place where we are not at

Paragraph 5 says the purpose of the Covenant is “so that the bonds of affection which hold us together may be re-affirmed and intensified.” Some (though I would completely disagree) consider The Episcopal Church (USA) has so far departed from Scripture that they are heretical and therefore ‘true’ Christians cannot be in communion with them at all. “Strengthening bonds of affection” assumes that there are existing bonds to strengthen.

2.) It is likely to be ignored

Section 1 sets out the traditional basis of faith of the Anglican Communion that all signatory Churches are to affirm. It is a good summary based on the foundation documents of the Anglican Church. However, in the absence of specific reference to sexual ethics or the crossing of diocesan boundaries, signatory Churches who go against traditional Anglican beliefs and practices in these areas are likely to argue that they haven't broken the faith basis of the Covenant. They are also likely to argue that they have not broken the 'communion' basis of the Covenant either.

Section 3.2.4-7 says that signatory Churches should:

“seek a shared mind with other Churches, through the Communion’s councils ... [and]... undertake wide consultation with the other Churches of the Anglican Communion and with the Instruments and Commissions of the Communion. ...in situations of conflict, to participate in mediated conversations, which involve face to face meetings, agreed parameters and a willingness to see such processes through. ...to have in mind that our bonds of affection and the love of Christ compel us always to uphold the highest degree of communion possible.”

No doubt signatories will say they have gone through all that consultation process and at the end of the process have concluded that it is still right to ordain practising gay bishops or cross diocesan boundaries etc.

3.) Discipline is not likely to happen

The Covenant says:

“4.1.3. Such mutual commitment does not represent submission to any external ecclesiastical jurisdiction. Nothing in this Covenant of itself shall be deemed to alter any provision of the Constitution and Canons of any Church of the Communion, or to limit its autonomy of governance. The Covenant does not grant to any one Church or any agency of the Communion control or direction over any Church of the Anglican Communion.”

“4.2.2. The Standing Committee of the Anglican Communion, responsible to the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates’ Meeting, shall monitor the functioning of the Covenant in the life of the Anglican Communion on behalf of the Instruments.”

“4.2.5. The Standing Committee may request a Church to defer a controversial action. If a Church declines to defer such action, the Standing Committee may recommend to any Instrument of Communion relational consequences which may specify a provisional limitation of participation in, or suspension from, that Instrument until the completion of the process set out below.”

4.2.6. On the basis of advice received from the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates’ Meeting, the Standing Committee may make a declaration that an action or decision is or would be “incompatible with the Covenant”.

4.2.7. On the basis of the advice received, the Standing Committee shall make recommendations as to relational consequences which flow from an action incompatible with the Covenant. These recommendations may be addressed to the Churches of the Anglican Communion or to the Instruments of the Communion and address the extent to which the decision of any covenanting Church impairs or limits the communion between that Church and the other Churches of the Communion, and the practical consequences of such impairment or limitation. Each Church or each Instrument shall determine whether or not to accept such recommendations.”

So, who are the members of the Standing Committee of the Anglican Communion (SCAC), the body charged with recommending “relational consequences” to a Church that has ignored the rest of the Communion and gone its own way?

http://www.anglicancommunion.org/communion/acc/scac/q_and_a.cfm

Well, the SCAC includes the Presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church (USA). She is hardly likely to judge that her Province has broken the Covenant. I cannot see the Presiding Bishop finding herself guilty of ignoring the 1998 Lambeth Conference (Resolution 1:10) <http://www.lambethconference.org/resolutions/1998/1998-1-10.cfm> and rejecting the request of the Archbishop of Canterbury

<http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/2650?q=glasspool> when this year she consecrated as a bishop another priest in a committed same sex relationship

http://www.episcopalchurch.org/79425_122244_ENG_HTM.htm

As to the traditionalist members of the SCAC, four of them have already resigned. On 5 February 2010, the Church Times reported

<http://www.churchtimes.co.uk/content.asp?id=88843> that the Bishop of Jerusalem and the Middle East, the Most Revd Mouneer Anis had resigned from SCAC. His letter of resignation stated the Committee had not applied the recommendations of the Windsor Report or Primates meetings and had “marginalised, disregarded or suppressed” all ‘orthodox’ voices. On 2 July, the Church Times reported

<http://www.churchtimes.co.uk/content.asp?id=96982> that the Bishop of Iran had resigned from the SCAC. On 9 July the Church Times reported

<http://www.churchtimes.co.uk/content.asp?id=97385> that the Archbishop of Uganda and his alternate had also resigned from the SCAC.

The SCAC appears to be a busted flush. Attempts can be made to bring more balance to the membership, but would it ever recommend “relational consequences” to one of its members? And even if it did, this would then have to be approved by all the other Churches. And even if they did, these unspecified “relational consequences” probably wouldn’t amount to much anyway.”

iii.) Further reading:

GS Misc 966 “The Faith and Order Commission: The Anglican Covenant: a briefing paper”
www.churchofengland.org/media/1161753/gsmisc966.pdf

The paper includes material about the history of the Covenant, provides some answers to frequently asked questions and also gives the full text of the Covenant itself.