

After General Synod July 2011: reporting back

All the papers for this meeting, together with the audio files and voting figures are on the Church of England website:

<http://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/structure/general-synod/agendas-and-papers/july-2011-group-of-sessions.aspx>

A transcript of the debates is on the Report of Proceedings section

<http://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/structure/general-synod/reports-of-proceedings.aspx>

Address by the Archbishop of Canterbury

The Archbishop spoke of the inspiration the Church in Congo had given him from a recent visit. The text of his speech is available on the Archbishop's website: **<http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/2122/archbishop-of-canterburys-presidential-address>**

Parochial Fees Order 2011

The Archbishops' Council proposed new fees for baptisms, weddings and funerals. The fees were intended to introduce consistency and clarity so that the published figures are what people will actually pay and people won't be hit with a lot of unexpected 'extras' that some churches load on. The priest's discretion to waive fees in cases of financial hardship would be retained, and fees for the funerals of children would be abolished.

Some Synod members said the proposed fees were too high, others said they were too low, others said they were too rigid. Amendments had been put down proposing making them higher or lower. Had Synod got as far as debating those amendments we would know whether the majority view was that they were too high or too low. However, before we could get to the amendments there was a preliminary general vote to 'consider' the fees. 134 voted in favour (including myself), 166 voted against. Therefore the proposed fees were rejected without getting to the amendments.

The Archbishops' Council will have to come back with a new fees proposal for the February Synod, but because they don't know whether the majority want them higher or lower, they will have to guess. Not Synod's finest hour!

Mission Action Planning

I voted for the Revd Dr Philip Plyming's amendment that the *Challenges for the New Quinquennium* report, discussed in February, be developed into a national mission strategy to support dioceses, deaneries and parishes in their own church growth. The amendment and then the motion was passed.

Bishop Victoria Matthews

On Sunday lunchtime, I attended a fringe meeting where Bishop Victoria Matthews of Christchurch New Zealand (and formerly Bishop of Edmonton, Canada) spoke. I have written a separate report on my website.

Higher Education Funding Changes

The Synod voted unanimously in favour of the recommendations in this report which sought to contain the increasing costs to the Church of England's ordination training budget due to the forthcoming increases in tuition and validation fees. My concerns about recommendation 5 had been largely answered in correspondence I had with the Ministry Division before the meeting.

Anglican-Methodist Covenant

I voted in favour of taking note of this report. It was passed.

The text of my speech and the link to the audio of the session is attached.

Admission of Baptized Adults to Communion

The Diocese of Bradford asked for changes to be made "to authorize the admission to the Holy Communion of adults who have been baptized but who have not been confirmed and who are not yet ready and desirous to be confirmed." Mr Halliday, proposing the motion said that there are adults who were baptised as babies, and who never normally come to church, who then come for a family event and might feel excluded if they couldn't come up to receive the Eucharist.

The Bishop of Chelmsford, Stephen Cottrell said,

...faith grows and develops and the best evangelism is about accompanying people on the journey, recognising the sacramental moments into which people are initiated into faith... The Bradford Diocesan Synod motion...says all they're wishing to do is to provide for adults what is already provided for children. However...the House of Bishops' Guidelines very carefully say that before children are admitted to communion...they are first prepared for that and there is a period of catechesis. Now if that's what Bradford Diocese really want, that we carefully prepare people by catechesis before they are admitted to communion...then they have their renewal of baptismal vows, which is a confirmation, and then we stick with the pattern that is actually working very well missionally. And of course none of us interrogate anybody when they come to the communion rail, so what are we worrying about?

I voted against the Bradford motion. The motion was lost.

Appointment of the Chair of the Business Committee

The candidate who had been nominated by the Archbishops' Council withdrew and this debate did not take place. The Venerable Julian Henderson, Archdeacon of Dorking therefore continues as acting Chair.

Eucharistic Prayers for Children

Two draft Eucharistic Prayers have been written for use in Primary Schools.

Attached is the speech I made in this debate.

The Synod voted for the draft Eucharistic Prayers to be considered by a Revision Committee. Synod members have until 12 August to write to the Revision Committee with suggestions for improvements to the prayers. I would welcome any ideas for improvements to the texts to be sent to me by 11 August so that I can consider including them in my letter to the Revision Committee. The draft texts may be found on pages 6-11 of this document:

<http://www.churchofengland.org/media/1283538/gs%201822.pdf>

House of Laity Elections

I voted in favour of having a review of how the House of Laity of General Synod and diocesan synods are elected. The vote was passed.

Committee for Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns

The Committee recommended "positive intentionality" for developing the talents of minority ethnic Anglicans and encouraging them into Church leadership. This approach was already used for encouraging women into Church leadership. They said the same level of determination should be given to encourage minority ethnic Anglicans into Church leadership. I voted for the recommendations. The motion was passed.

Archbishops' Council Budget for 2012

The proposal was for a 1.8% increase in the national Church budget for 2012. There were speeches saying the expenditure is too high and there were other speeches objecting to the cuts that would be needed to keep the increase down to 1.8%. Andrew Britton presenting the budget said it would be helpful if those who made a speech saying 'don't cut this' could at the same time make an alternative suggestion of where a cut could be made. However, the speeches that followed said how their area should not be cut, but offered no suggestions for alternative cuts in other areas. I voted for the budget. The budget was passed.

Gavin Oldham proposed in a following motion that there should be an annual report which showed combined national and diocesan expenditure. He said it may be that a national post is abolished in order to save money in the national Church budget, but that the work of that officer still had to be done and so 44 dioceses each employ their own officer to do it, resulting a much higher cost to the Church overall. Andrew Britton replied that the difficulty was that diocesan accounts were not consistent with each other, they used different headings and categories, so it was not possible to produce like-for-like financial comparisons.

The Church's Mission and Ministry among People of Different Faiths

Then Synod endorsed the work of the "Presence and Engagement" programme, which has a website which has resources to support the mission and ministry of

parishes in multi religious contexts www.presenceandengagement.org.uk

[Conversations with the United Reformed Church](#)

All the speeches said how it is good for our two Churches to work closer together. All true, but not a very exciting debate!

[Christians in the Holy Land](#)

The Archbishop of Canterbury spoke of his concern about the number of Christians who were leaving the Holy Land. He had set up a new fund to support them and donations are welcome:

<http://www.friendsoftheholylan.org.uk/Home/Support-Us/Archbishop-of-Canterbury-s-Fund>

[Church Commissioners' Annual Report](#)

Andreas Whittam Smith, First Church Estates Commissioner, presented the Commissioners' Annual Report. He spoke of the problems in the world economy and how the Commissioners were diversifying their investments to attempt to weather the storm.

My concern about the Commissioners ceasing to provide loans for clergy retirement housing, which meant that the Pensions Board has had to go to Santander to provide the loans was answered in correspondence before the meeting. Basically, with lots of financial caveats, in broad terms, the Commissioners expect to make 1.4% more from investments than they did from the loans. The Pensions Board expect to make a 0.6% loss from having to borrow the money from Santander to make the loans. So overall, the Church of England should still be financially better off.

[Education](#)

The Bishop of Oxford, John Pritchard, said that local authorities were withering on the vine as schools converted to academy status. He said this provides an opportunity for Diocesan Boards of Education to fill the gap by offering services to academy schools that had previously been offered by local authorities.

[Before General Synod July 2011: inviting your views](#)

[Business Committee Report \(GS 1824\)](#)

In my report of the February General Synod I wrote that I had not voted against a bishop chairing the Business Committee, but that the majority had and had requested a new candidate to be put forward. Well, at this Synod the same bishop has been proposed again! (see paragraph 40 of the Business Committee report). I am therefore minded to vote against on this occasion, because though I had no problem with it, I think it is wrong to have ignored the Synod vote.

[The Payments to the Churches Conservation Trust Order 2011 \(GS 1828 & 1828X\)](#)

When a church building becomes redundant, the Church Commissioners try to sell it. If it cannot be sold, and is too historic to be demolished it is handed over to the Churches Conservation Trust (CCT). Page 11 of the CCT Annual Review for 2009-2010

<http://www.visitchurches.org.uk/Assets/Governancedocuments/0910AnnualReport.pdf?1298466684> shows that 55% of the income for the Trust comes from the Government and 24% from the Church Commissioners. However, for the next 4 years the Government is cutting its grant by 20%. The Church Commissioners are proposing to freeze the level of the Church grant. My natural reaction to Church finances is to look for cuts wherever possible. However, I recently met with Crispin Truman, Chief Executive of the CCT and Rebecca Rees, Regional Manager and I have decided that any cut would be both a false economy and a backward step. If the CCT did not take on these Churches, they would have to be maintained by the dioceses, under a statutory duty to look after listed buildings, and the costs would be likely to be greater. The CCT has a lot of experience in working with the local community and enabling them to use the building and raise funds towards its maintenance. They also have educational and other schemes, which bring young people into these churches, many of whom would never ordinarily cross the threshold of a church. The CCT also work with communities who are struggling to maintain their church building to apply for grants and raise funds, to *prevent* a church being declared redundant in the first place.

[Mission Action Planning in the Church of England \(GS 1835A & GS 1835B\)](#)

This is a Private Members' Motion from the Revd Mark Ireland to "...call on the Archbishops' Council to work with the central structures of the Church of England to produce a national mission action plan that will support parishes in growing the number of worshipping Anglicans, enabling them to grow in faith." There is a good paper from Mr Ireland (GS 1835A). The response from the Mission and Public Affairs Council (GS 1835B) in paragraph 12 rather misses the point, saying that "mission initiatives" are best at the local level. But Mr Ireland's paper is about a national strategic plan, which prioritises the resources of the national Church for mission. It is not simply about 'mission initiatives.' However, we already have several national plans: the "Challenges for the New Quinquennium" document (GS 1815); the Archbishops' Council already has Strategic Objectives (see page 2 of the Archbishops' Council 2012 Budget GS 1842); each national department has a business plan (see page 4, para 4, of the Budget); and the Archbishops' Council has also had a Financial Strategy Review (see page 5, para 10 of the Budget). Is there room for another plan?

[Higher Education Funding Changes: A report from the Ministry Council \(GS 1836, GS Misc 990 and GS Misc 990A\)](#)

Most ordination training courses are accredited by UK universities. However, the

forthcoming rise in tuition fees, and likely rise in validation fees, means that the bill for ordination training will soar. A working party has come up with six recommendations to reduce the impact. I am happy with the proposals apart from recommendation 5 (GS Misc 990):

5.19 The Church of England currently funds a small number of students to undertake BAs in Theology and Religious Studies in the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge and Durham and another group who take the BTh degrees in Oxford and Cambridge, all of which are more expensive than standard vocational awards.

5.20 The fees for these students, we anticipate, will rise in line with the overall tuition fee for undergraduates from £3,500 per annum to £9,000 per annum, though in most of these cases money comes back to the theological college because of the teaching which it provides for these awards. Ordinands who take these routes are by definition already graduates in another discipline and so ineligible for student loans.

...5.22 ...it is of immense value to the Church of England that a proportion of our clergy have studied theology largely in, or related to, the environment of a world class university department. The value lies in the formation this gives in mission, apologetics, academic rigour and engagement with the academy...

5.23 We therefore believe that these routes should continue to form part of the mixed ecology of training to the extent that as a national Church we should continue our present level of investment (that is to the level of the present fees and the present number of students)...

5.24 The balance of the fees above the costs allowed for here, we believe, should come from bursary funds established by the training institutions and by the dioceses.

To say that something is important and must continue, but then to say that theological colleges – who don't have any money – should set up bursaries to pay for our ordinand's tuition fees is unfair and unrealistic.

Moving Forward in Covenant: Interim Report (2011) of the Joint Implementation Commission (Phase 2) under the Covenant between The Methodist Church of Great Britain and the Church of England (The Methodist Church, ISBN 978 1 85852 365 1)

As GS 1837 explains, this 59 page report encourages expanding to a wider area, the Joint Ecumenical Partnerships whereby the Methodist and Church of England churches have a shared mission and ministry. The wider area groups would be called "Covenanted Partnerships in Extended Areas". This is hailed as a great step forward, but on reading the report it seemed to just be giving a name to what already can be done now, and encouraging it.

The other part of the report is about the diaconate. It highlights that, although deacons in the Methodist Church and the CofE do roughly the same things, the structure of that ministry is very different. In the Methodist Church you are either ordained as a deacon or as a presbyter. If a Methodist deacon wants to

become a presbyter they have to resign from the order of deacon (page 46, paragraph 13). In the Church of England deacons are generally a one year transitional stage to becoming a priest, and they are seen as part of the same order of ministry. I was expecting some bold recommendations, for example, that the Methodist Church should make changes so that when a deacon becomes a presbyter they are not renouncing their diaconate but adding to it. And that the Church of England should promote the deacon as a distinctive calling that can be permanent, and therefore have diaconate vocations initiatives etc. However, the conclusion of the report simply had the following heart-warming words (page 50):

23. In conclusion, the diverse understandings of our callings are rooted in the rich histories and traditions of our Churches. Understanding the differences is a treasure to the dialogue between the Church of England and the Methodist Church and it can only ever help deepen the melody that is composed, as we all offer our ministries in God's world.

The General Synod is a decision making body, but we are only asked to decide to "Note" the report. I feel it is a missed opportunity.

Admission of Baptized Adults to Communion (GS 1840A and GS1840B)

The Canons (rules) of the Church of England say that the proper order of initiation into the Church is baptism, then confirmation, then receiving communion. (Canon B15 "...There shall be admitted to the Holy Communion: (a) members of the Church of England who have been confirmed...or are ready and desirous to be so confirmed..."). In 1997 an exception was made to allow children, who were not ready and desirous to be confirmed, to receive communion.

This motion (from the Bradford Diocesan Synod) proposes taking the next logical step, which is to allow the same provision for adults.

I am uneasy about communion before confirmation for children or adults. I believe that one should make a personal decision to follow Jesus and to make that public in confirmation, and then receive His body and blood in the Eucharist. I think that this is closer to the pattern of the early Church, where communion was after a period of teaching and a public declaration of faith. It also avoids the danger of 1 Corinthians 11:29, "For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgement against themselves." The Bradford paper GS 1840A argues, "6...if a baptized adult goes to receive Holy Communion, they are making a public statement of faith in Christ." If that is a good answer to why communion should be allowed to any who are baptised, it also means that the Church can get rid of confirmation because it no longer has a role in Christian initiation.

There has recently been published, *The Journey of Christian Initiation*, Edited by Paul Avis, Church House Publishing 2011, which includes an essay "Is baptism 'complete sacramental initiation?'" which will be relevant to this subject.

Additional Eucharistic Prayers (GS 1822 & GS Misc 983)

In 2008 the General Synod passed a motion to request "...Eucharistic Prayers suitable for use on occasions when a significant number of children are present or when it is otherwise pastorally appropriate to meet the needs of children present." The two prayers have been tested in 713 parishes and changes made based on feedback received. General Synod is being asked to vote that they "be considered for revision in committee."

I am disappointed with the two texts. Paragraph 2 of the Guidance Notes (GS Misc 983) says that the Prayers assume most of the children present will be of Primary School age. I therefore asked my 7 year old to read the prayers and he fell at the first hurdle asking me what line 3, "Lift up your hearts" meant - and to be frank I had trouble explaining it myself! Theological terms should not necessarily be dumbed-down for children, but the main difficulty of these texts is in complex expressions, not the theological terms at all. For example, "on high" might be more easy for a child to understand if it were written "heaven". It is possible to have something beautiful, theologically accurate and easy for children to understand. Graham Kendrick proved it in his song *I'm special*, in which the first verse is:

I'm special because God has loved me,
For He gave the best thing that He had to save me.
His own Son Jesus, crucified to take the blame,
For all the bad things I have done.

This last sentence is easier to understand than the line in the draft Eucharistic prayer "He suffered on the cross; he died to save us from our sins;"

The weird thing about the draft prayers is that some of the sentences are in difficult language whilst others are in babyish language, "the starry sky above". The prayers are trying to be all things to all people and it doesn't really work. That said, the wording of the central part of the prayers, remembering the Last Supper is good. Whether the prayers can be amended along the lines of the central part, I don't know, I think the Revision Committee have a tough job to do, particularly given that the best poetry is not written by committee!

House of Laity Elections (GS 1843A & GS 1843B)

This motion from the London Diocese asks for a "...review of how the House of Laity of this Synod and the houses of laity of diocesan synods are elected, particular consideration being given to whether the electorate should be some body of persons other than the lay members of deanery synods." Currently only lay members of deanery synods can vote for lay members of General Synod. I support moving to universal suffrage, that everyone on the electoral roll should be able to vote for their General Synod representatives. I therefore intend to vote in favour of this motion.

Archbishops' Council Draft Budget 2012 (GS 1842)

The report states:

45. The Vote 5 budget provides assistance by way of a grant to the Church of England Pensions Board to help fund the cost of the subsidy for

some occupants of properties in the Church's Housing Assistance for the Retired Ministry (CHARM) scheme which ensures that all clergy have access to housing upon their retirement.

46. Since the inception of the CHARM scheme around 80% of the capital required to fund the scheme came from the Church Commissioners through loan finance on a 'value-linked' basis. In 2007 the Church Commissioners gave notice of their intention (on investment and diversification grounds) to cease providing capital for new loans, and also for capital improvements for existing properties, when the existing financing agreement expired in July 2010 and hence the Church of England Pensions Board (who administer the scheme) would need to explore alternative sources of capital for the scheme.

47. The Pensions Board secured a loan facility with a commercial provider to provide the CHARM scheme with new capital (up to £50 million to be drawn down over a period of 10-years) from July 2010. Under the new funding arrangements the Pensions Board retain the full risks and rewards of future capital appreciation on property acquired. Acknowledging this, the Pensions Board agreed that it would endeavour to smooth the annual increases in support for the scheme funded by the dioceses via Vote 5 to 5% per annum through the use of its charitable funds for the duration of the 2011-2015 quinquennium.

48. Acknowledging the above, the Archbishops' Council recommends a 2012 budget with net expenditure of £3.586 million - an increase of £171,000 (5.0%). The budget includes provision for meeting its entire Vote 5 net expenditure via the apportionment.

I have emailed the Chief Executives of the Church Commissioners and the Pensions Board, seeking a 'big picture' of the overall cost to the Church, of the Church Commissioners ceasing to make the loans, and the Pensions Board having to go to a commercial provider. I have been given a preliminary reply so far. The Church Commissioners have a duty to maximise their investments, but the extra profits they make may be negated by the extra costs to the Pensions Board of securing private finance. If so, the Church of England as a whole might be worse off financially. If so, perhaps the foundation documents of the organisations need to be amended so that they work with other Church bodies to take the overall benefit of the Church into account.

Conversations with the United Reformed Church (GS 1841)

This is a report of "informal conversations" that took place between the Church of England and the United Reformed Church between 2007 and 2010. You might think that an "informal" conversation is a chat. But in this case, "informal" means meetings at which minutes are taken and written up into a 33 page report and sold for £5.00!

The report has a helpful summary of the unity talks going back before the creation of the URC 40 years ago, right back to 1662 when those who took a Presbyterian approach to church order were expelled from the established Church. The report quotes passages from other ecumenical agreements that

both the CofE and URC agree about. The report highlights areas where there are still disagreements. I was disappointed however, that three years of talks takes us no further to offering a solution to these disagreements, it just restates where we are. The report recommends "further joint work". Lets hope that the theological work of the next group is a little more proactive.

Anglican-Methodist Covenant

General Synod Speech by Adrian Vincent 10 July 2011 on the report
Moving Forward in Covenant: Interim Report of the Joint Implementation Commission.

"Canon Swyer spoke about the permanent diaconate consultation in Annex 1 of the Report. Reading it for the first time, when I got half way through it I thought, this is very good because it's identifying the differences in the diaconate between our two Churches, and it's going to recommend clear ways for how we can move closer together. As I was reading I thought the inevitable conclusion is going to recommend: for the Methodist Church they need to make changes so that when a deacon becomes a presbyter they don't have to renounce their diaconate; and it should recommend to the Church of England changes to promote the diaconate as a real permanent option and have diaconate vocations initiatives etc.

I was a little disappointed therefore, when we actually came to the recommendations, that they are little more than hints, and the conclusion on page 50 says:

"In conclusion, the diverse understandings of our callings are rooted in the rich histories and traditions of our Churches. Understanding the differences is a treasure to the dialogue between the Church of England and the Methodist Church and it can only ever help deepen the melody that is composed, as we all offer our ministries in God's world."

Well, talk of richness and melodies makes it a 'good' Church report - because Church reports always talk about "richness" - and it's all very heart-warming stuff - but I think it's somewhat lacking in ambition and I think there should have been braver recommendations, recommending changes that we could each make to the diaconate to bring our Churches closer together."

The audio of this debate is on the Church of England website:
<http://www.churchofengland.org/media-centre/news/2011/07/general-synod-summary-of-business-sunday-10th-july-2011-pm.aspx> click on "Audio Session part 1" (my speech is 2 hours 14 minutes in).

Eucharistic Prayers for Children

Additional Eucharistic Prayers, (GS 1822 and GS Misc 983)

Adrian Vincent's speech in the General Synod debate 11 July 2011

The audio of this debate is available at:

<http://www.churchofengland.org/media-centre/news/2011/07/general-synod-summary-of-business-monday-11th-july-2011-am.aspx> my speech is 1 hour 9 minutes in:

"We're told we need two more Eucharistic prayers because the eight we've already got can't be understood by primary school children. So if we are going to have two more prayers we need to make sure that they are understandable by Primary School children. Now my son Samuel is seven, he goes to a church school, goes to church each Sunday and we have a Bible story every night and he has quite a good knowledge of the Bible, so you'd think he'd have quite a good chance of understanding these. So I said to Samuel last week, "the Church has written these two Services with you in mind, let's read them together and you tell me if there is anything you don't understand."

Well, didn't take long, line 3, he said "I don't understand what 'lift up your hearts' means", and, well, I didn't really understand it myself! So I said, "we'll pass over that, carry on Samuel".

And then he said "I don't understand 'it is right to give thanks and praise'" I was surprised he didn't understand that. If the line was "Thank you God", he would understand, but once you complicate the sentence structure and say "it is right to give thanks" he got a bit foggy about it.

And what I was expecting, again he had trouble with, "He died to save us from our sins" because that's a theological concept that I was expecting that he'd have difficulty with. Father Seville has said that children need things that are concrete, and, without getting into drafting, it can be done, so for example, Graham Kendrick's song *I'm Special*, that's got the line "Jesus, crucified to take the blame for all the bad things I have done." Now that doesn't take the whole of "died to save us from our sins", but it's a way that children can grasp onto, it's putting things into practical terms.

I was very pleased though with the rest of Prayer 1, how Jesus took the bread etc, the heart of that is easily expressed and understandable.

Then we come to Prayer 2. Oh dear! It's got the worst of both worlds, it's got the difficult lines of Prayer 1 and it also goes to the other extreme of having what Samuel would think of as babyish elements. Father Seville has talked about "the starry sky above". Now Samuel did *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star* when he was at Play School* and he'd think of that sort of reference as babyish. Praying about birds and fishes in the sea, that sort of thing, that doesn't touch

his life, that's not what his life is about. Let me tell you what concerns him: he struggles with his school work, his friends are a big concern to him, will they play with him or not, will he be bullied? That's what his life is about. We're imposing an adult idyllic image of childhood that it's all about trees and leaves and plants and stuff. He lives in a modern, pressurised urban life, and that's not about him. Yes Prayer 2 does have a bit that touches on him, but it's labelled "in times of sadness" - but this is a daily experience! We need something that touches him all the time.

Finally, I'm dubious about the question and answer bits in Prayer 2. A member of the Liturgical Commission has written, they're in order to have a "high level of interaction and even fun." Well yes to interaction, but I'm not sure fun is the right place. Yes have fun in the service, have songs with actions and fun elements. But Eucharistic Prayers are remembering Jesus' suffering and death for us, it's not the place for the fun bits."

[* I actually said Primary School, but I meant to say Play School.]