

After General Synod February 2012: reporting back

The Church of England website <http://www.churchofengland.org/media-centre/news/2012.aspx> has full details of the motions passed, together with the links to the audio files where you can listen to any of the debates. A full transcript is on the Report of Proceedings section of the CofE website <http://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/structure/general-synod/reports-of-proceedings.aspx>

Independent Commission on Assisted Dying

The Synod passed a motion, which I voted for, which included to, "affirm the intrinsic value of every human life" and to "encourage the Church's continued involvement in the wider agenda of the care of those approaching the end of their lives and the support of those caring for them."

Parochial Fees

The Synod approved the fees with an amendment that the fee for burial in churchyard following a service in church should include something towards the cost of the upkeep of the churchyard.

Draft Clergy Discipline (Amendment) Measure

This was passed without incident. I voted for it.

Women Bishops

There was a presentation on the draft Code of Practice on the Tuesday and approval for some technical amendments to the draft Measure on the Thursday, but the key debate was on Wednesday 7 Feb, where the Diocesan Synod Motions of Manchester (asking for a change in provisions from 'delegation' to something like 'co-ordinate' jurisdiction) and of Southwark (asking for no change) were debated. It was a high quality debate and I recommend listening to the audio recording: <http://www.churchofengland.org/media/1399951/feb1213.mp3>

The Venerable Cherry Vann put the case for the Manchester motion and it was helpful that a senior woman priest, fully supportive of the ordination of women as bishops, put the case for the need for the House of Bishops to amend the draft legislation to enable traditionalists to stay in the Church alongside the ordination of women to the episcopate. The motion asked the House of Bishops to make an amendment "in the manner" of the Archbishops' amendment of July 2010. That amendment had been:

In clause 2(1) leave out the words "way of delegation to" and after clause 2(1) insert -
"(2) The episcopal ministry referred to in subsections (1), (3) and (5) shall be exercisable by virtue of this section and shall not divest the bishop of the diocese of any of his or her functions."

In other words, rather than the bishop for traditionalist parishes being under the delegated authority of the woman diocesan bishop (and consequently unable to offer to traditionalists sacramental assurance within the apostolic succession), the two bishops would instead have 'co-ordinate jurisdiction', i.e. be of equal standing and work alongside each other, without any reduction in either bishop's authority. The Archbishop of York spoke strongly in favour of the Manchester motion, and he quoted that the draft amendment to the legislation explicitly said that co-ordinate jurisdiction "shall not divest the bishop of the diocese of any of his or her functions", therefore the woman bishop would have the same authority and functions of any other bishop. Nevertheless, several speeches asserted that co-ordinate jurisdiction was unacceptable because it would mean that women bishops would be "second class bishops", however, they didn't say how they had come to that legal interpretation.

The Southwark motion, by contrast, called on the House of Bishops "not to ...amend the draft Measure". An amendment was put to the Southwark motion by the Revd Peter Spiers, so that it would now call on the House of Bishops "not to amend the draft Measure substantially". The Synod passed the Spiers amendment:

	For	Against	Abstentions
House of Bishops	40	5	1
House of Clergy	122	70	1
House of Laity	107	85	4

I voted against because I wanted the Manchester motion passed, not an amended Southwark motion.

The Synod then passed the amended Southwark motion (thereby doing away with the Manchester motion). The final motion read:

That this Synod

(a) noting the significant support the draft Bishops and Priests (Consecration and Ordination of Women) Measure has received in the Houses of Bishops, Clergy and Laity of diocesan synods, and

(b) desiring that the draft Measure be returned to the Synod for consideration on the Final Approval Stage substantially unamended so that it can be seen if the proposals embodied in it in the form in which it has been referred to the dioceses can attain the level of support required to achieve Final Approval, request the House of Bishops in the exercise of its power under Standing Order 60(b) not to amend the draft Measure substantially.

The voting was:

	For	Against	Abstentions
House of Bishops	26	16	5
House of Clergy	128	64	0
House of Laity	111	85	1

I voted against because I wanted the Manchester motion passed, not an amended Southwark motion. That amended motion was then passed by a show of hands (I voted against because I was not happy with the amended motion, though I suppose it is better than nothing).

Personally I am disappointed with the outcome. The Archbishops' amendment of July 2010, which Manchester Diocese was calling for, or something like it, had been a way to 'square the circle', to introduce women bishops on exactly the same authority as male bishops, whilst enabling traditionalists to receive the ministry of bishops that meets their theological needs. The current draft legislation does not achieve that. Whether the House of Bishops can amend the legislation in a way that is not 'substantial' but that does achieve that, I am not sure. I pray that they will, though I am doubtful.

In the debate, traditionalists were saying that if the Manchester motion was passed and an amendment along the lines of the Archbishops' amendment was made, this would ensure that the legislation is passed in July, because enough traditionalists and conservative evangelicals will vote for it due to the provisions being sufficient for them. They argued that if it is not amended in that way, it increases the risk of it not being passed in July. However, it was the speakers from Women and the Church (WATCH) who said, no, bring it to July unchanged and put it to the vote. We shall have to see what happens in July. If the legislation is not amended to allow traditionalists to remain in the Church with integrity, and as a consequence the legislation is not passed in July- failing to get a two thirds majority in the House of Laity - it is the traditionalists who will be blamed for the legislation not being passed, but that blame will be undeserved.

Appointment of Archdeacons

This was an excellent opportunity for those who have theological difficulties with the ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopate, to demonstrate their support for women in ministry and women in leadership, by making a change to allow women (and male) deacons to become archdeacons. It was also an opportunity for unity whereby supporters of the ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopate could agree to the removal of this 'glass ceiling' on permanent deacons. In the debate traditionalists spoke in favour of the change, but it was spoken against by the supporters of the ordination of women and voted down (their argument was that all archdeacons need to be able to preside at the eucharist). A shame. But perhaps this will come back every few years, just as the ordination of women to the priesthood did, every few years until views change and it is passed.

Chair of the Business Committee

The Synod voted that the Chair of the Synod's Business Committee should become an elected position. The Bishop of Willesden, Pete Broadbent, put down an amendment proposing that members of the House of Bishops should not be permitted to be candidates.

The speech that I gave:

Adrian Vincent General Synod speech in the debate on the Chair of the Business Committee
7 February 2012

The audio of my speech is here:

<http://www.churchofengland.org/media/1400007/feb1214.mp3>, 28 minutes in.

Bishop Peter said that, because the House of Bishops meets in secret and people don't know what they get up to, it would be wrong for a bishop to chair the Business Committee.

But I invite you to vote against the amendment, because there is a better way.

House of Bishops Standing Order 13 says, "The public shall be admitted to all sittings of the House within the limits of such seating capacity as may be allocated..."

Now, in this age of austerity, there appears to have been a severe shortage of chairs at House of Bishops' meetings!

What happens, as Bishop Peter said, is that at the start of every meeting the House of Bishops vote to have the entire meeting in private session under Standing Order 14. Then, if there's something really confidential they then move to a private, private, session, without staff.

What we need is for the House of Bishops to move to the way of working envisaged in its own Standing Orders: to allow the public to observe their meetings; and only when there is something genuinely very confidential, for them to move into a private session.

Once people see the House of Bishops in operation, they will see how boring most of the meetings are – and as a former House of Bishops' minute taker for seven years I can vouch for that! – and this will dispel any suspicion that bishops meet in smoke-filled rooms doing secret dodgy deals.

Dispelling that suspicion will remove the concern about bishops chairing the Business Committee. That's the way to deal with it, not by banning bishops from

chairing the Committee in the first place. Please vote against Bishop Pete's amendment.

The Bishop's amendment was lost (I voted against), and the overall change was approved (I voted infavour).

[Eucharistic Prayers for Children](#)

These were approved, the next stage of which is consideration by the House of Bishops.

[Higher Education Funding Changes](#)

Some concerns were raised by Synod members and were answered by the Bishop of Sheffield.

[Reform of the House of Lords](#)

The Synod confirmed the work of the CofE Group that is engaging with this subject.

[Health Care and the Church's Mission](#)

The Synod voted 208 to nil, to affirm the work of chaplains in the NHS.

[Before General Synod February 2012: inviting your views](#)

All the documents for the 6-9 February 2012 General Synod are on the Church of England website: <http://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/structure/general-synod/agendas-and-papers/february-2012-group-of-sessions.aspx>

[Independent Commission on Assisted Dying](#) (GS 1851A & GS 1851B)

This private members motion criticises Lord Falconer's so called 'independent' commission that recommended allowing physician assisted suicide in some circumstances. The above briefing papers explain the issues. They also refer to two papers on the Mission and Public Affairs section of the CofE website <http://www.churchofengland.org/our-views/medical-ethics-health-social-care-policy/protecting-life-opposing-assisted-suicide.aspx> 'The Intrinsic Value of Life' and 'Turning a Blind Eye'. The latter document says,

"current legislation protects vulnerable individuals from being encouraged to commit suicide, from being pressured to do so and from feeling that it is a matter of indifference to society if they live or die."

I do not support a change in the law and consequently intend vote for the motion.

[Parochial Fees](#) (GS 1852, GS 1852X & GS Misc 1015)

In my report on the July 2011 Synod I wrote that it had not been Synod's finest hour to reject the draft Fees without first voting on whether they were too high, too low, or too inflexible. So, the draft has had to be revised without a clear steer from Synod. The revised report has made amendments that make more of the fees open to local discretion than previously proposed. Those amendments go against the general objective that the public should know what the costs will be of baptisms, weddings and funerals without being hit by lots of extras that different churches might load on that are not published and have no consistency. That said, the amendments should enable the revised proposals to get through Synod this time, and they will still bring in a much greater level of consistency and transparency than we have now. The explanatory note (GS Misc 1015) gives a clear explanation of all the proposals. I intend to vote for them.

[Draft Clergy Discipline \(Amendment\) Measure](#) (GS 1814A & 1814Y)

In my report on the February 2011 Synod can be found the letter that I wrote to the Revision Committee on this Measure where I criticise the need for, and the costs of, a new clause which would ban clergy from being members of those political parties that the House of Bishops judge to be racist. My representations are referred to in the Revision Committee Report (GS 1814Y),

8. Mr Adrian Vincent also questioned whether clause 1(4) was needed. He submitted that in February 2009 Synod had sent a strong signal that racism would not be tolerated in the Church, and that it was inconsistent with Christian discipleship. He pointed out that if criminal proceedings were successfully brought against a cleric under the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006, disciplinary procedures could be triggered under the existing provisions of the CDM.

My suggested alternative was rejected by the Revision Committee. Nevertheless, I still intend to vote in favour of the Measure.

Women Bishops

There will be a presentation on the Draft Code of Practice (GS Misc 1007).

There will then be a debate on the Draft Measure and Canon (GS 1847, GS 1708-9Z, GS Misc 1708B & 1709B). This will include a vote on whether to ask the House of Bishops to amend the draft legislation prior to final approval in July (GS 1854A, GS 1854B & 1854C).

There is also a note on future timetable (GS Misc 1012).

Last year dioceses were asked to vote for or against the draft legislation. They were not allowed to amend the draft, just vote 'yes' or 'no', but they could then pass a following motion asking for changes. 42 dioceses voted 'yes' and 2 voted 'no', 12 dioceses (including Manchester) then passed following motions asking for changes to be made to the legislation and one diocese (Southwark) passed a following motion saying that there should be no change to the legislation. The Manchester and Southwark motions will be debated at the February Synod. GS 1847 has all the voting figures. Paragraph 9 of that report explains that the Manchester motion along with 5 other dioceses, voted to call on the House of Bishops to amend the draft legislation in the way proposed by the Archbishops at the July 2010 group of sessions. The Archbishops' July 2010 motion was voted on before I was a member of General Synod, but I spoke of my support for the proposal at the Guildford Diocese election hustings when I stood as a candidate for election to General Synod in September 2010, and reported in the News section of my website:

At the July [2010] 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. [...] 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.

The Manchester motion means Synod has the opportunity to vote on whether to ask the House of Bishops to make that amendment. They will also vote on the Southwark motion that no change should be made. Manchester's arguments are in GS 1854A, Southwark's arguments are in GS 1854B.

This debate will be the one that has the most Press attention and about which there has been the most lobbying. For example all General Synod members have been sent an email from WATCH (Women and the Church) urging them to vote against the Manchester motion. It stated, "Senior women clergy have repeatedly indicated that they would not be prepared to accept appointment as bishops under such amended legislation." However, the Manchester motion is being proposed by a woman archdeacon, the Venerable Cherry Vann, so there appears to not be as clear an opposition to the amendment amongst senior women clergy as WATCH suggests.

There is a lot elsewhere on my website on this subject. In short my views are that the legislation is designed to achieve two things: to permit the ordination of women to the episcopate; and to give provisions for those who hold the traditional theological view that would enable them to stay in the Church of England once there are women bishops. Traditionalists are clear that the provisions for them in the draft legislation do not meet their theological needs. If you hold the traditional theological view of the need for sacramental assurance within the apostolic succession, or the evangelical view of biblical headship, then the offer of a male bishop under the delegated authority of a woman bishop does not address that theological difficulty. A male bishop with authority in their own right, working alongside the woman bishop in co-ordinate authority, might work. Hence the proposed amendment.

In my view, there is no point having provisions for people if they don't meet the needs of those for whom they have been designed. The proposed amendment would at least give a chance that the legislation could meet the needs of traditionalists, and I therefore intend to vote for the amendment. If the motion is lost, the legislation will not meet the above dual objectives and I would therefore expect to vote against at final approval stage in July. If the motion is passed and the House of Bishops duly amends the legislation I will study and consult on whether the amendment that the House of Bishops makes does meet the needs of those for whom it is designed. If it does I would expect to vote for the legislation at final approval in July.

Appointment of Archdeacons (GS 1846A & 1846B)

This motion would permit the possibility of deacons becoming archdeacons, as was the case in the early Church. Later in the Church of England's history this was changed to only allow priests to become archdeacons. That change fitted in the days when the diaconate was only seen as simply a training stage on the way to becoming a priest. However, there are deacons in the CofE who, like the Methodist Church, see the diaconate as a distinctive, permanent, ministry and therefore remain 'distinctive deacons' or 'permanent deacons'. To prevent the possibility of deacons becoming archdeacons seems to me to be without historical or theological justification. I intend to vote in favour of the motion.

Chair of the Business Committee and amendments to Standing Orders (GS 1855)

My February and July 2011 Synod reports explained that the appointment of the Chair of the Business Committee has been a continuing storm within the General Synod teacup. The proposal is now to amend the standing orders so that the Chair of the Business Committee is chosen by election. I intend to vote in favour of the proposal.

Eucharistic Prayers for Children (GS 1822A & 1822Y)

In the news section of my website I reported on the submission I made to the Revision Committee on the draft Additional Eucharistic Prayers. My specific suggestions for amendment were not accepted, but the Revision Committee has made changes to the prayers that have addressed most of the concerns I raised. I intend to vote in favour of the revised texts. I am most happy with Prayer 1, because it is simple and clear and should work well without putting in the optional bits in square brackets.

Higher Education Funding Changes (GS Misc 1008)

This is an update on the work to replace the many different institutions that validate the Church of England's theological training, with a single validation provider, thereby saving money and increasing consistency of course provision. Some are worried that it won't necessarily save money and that it will reduce theological diversity. In terms of money, the Ministry Division have not yet gone out to tender. If the tenders show money would not be saved then we don't

have to go ahead with it. I also doubt it will massively reduce diversity, and common standards and core curriculum are in my view a good thing.

Reform of the House of Lords (GS 1856A, 1856B & GS Misc 1004)

This motion has been overtaken by events. It asked for a working party to be set up to respond to the Government's consultation on House of Lords reform. This working party is now in existence and the Archbishops' have already made a very good submission (GS Misc 1004). It makes points such as:

10. At a time of considerable public concern over our national political life and the conduct of those who serve the nation in Parliament, it must at the very least be highly questionable whether a reformed House consisting very largely or wholly of those elected from party lists would increase public confidence in our constitutional arrangements, or be a recipe for effective and accountable government.

...47. The Church of England, by law established, holds central to its mission a commitment to minister to the whole community, to people of all faiths and none. According to Professor Tariq Modood: "the minimal nature of the Anglican establishment, its proven openness to other denominations and faiths seeking public space, and the fact that its very existence is an ongoing acknowledgement of the public character of religion, are all reasons why it may be far less intimidating to the minority faiths than a triumphal secularism." Whilst in his submission to the Royal Commission, the Chief Rabbi, now Lord Sacks, said "disestablishment would be a significant retreat from the notion that we share any values and beliefs at all. And that would be a path to more, not fewer, tensions. Establishment secures a central place for spirituality in the public square. This benefits all faiths, not just Christianity.

Health Care and the Church's Mission (GS 1857)

This paper says that hospital chaplaincy is very important and asks the General Synod to pass a motion to say so. No doubt we will pass it unanimously. The costs involved in the General Synod debating this report which everyone already agrees with, could probably have been better spent training people to become hospital chaplains.