

After General Synod July 2013: reporting back

Women bishops

I found the General Synod facilitated small group conversations of 6 July very valuable, though they were a bruising time for many, as people shared deep feelings with those with whom they disagree.

8 July was the debate on the motion on next steps for women bishops legislation. Of the four options in the House of Bishops' paper (GS 1886), the motion proposed Option One, which would give no provision for traditionalist parishes in the legislation, and would repeal their existing rights (the right of a parish to request a male priest, or additional ministry from a traditionalist bishop would go: Paragraph 79, "The repeal of the statutory rights to pass Resolutions A and B under the 1993 Measure, plus the rescinding of the Episcopal Ministry Act of Synod"). Provision for traditionalists would instead be by the "discretionary decisions of individual bishops" (paragraph 88).

A reason given for this as a way forward was that Synod had tried giving provisions to traditionalists in legislation last time, but that process had failed with the failure of the November 2012 Final Approval vote. However, others were of the view that Synod had consistently failed to give traditionalists provision in legislation, and this had been the cause of the failure at Final Approval, and the answer therefore is to give traditionalists real provision in legislation. So two different interpretations are being placed on the history of the previous women bishops legislation, key milestones of which were:

2004 the traditionalist group Forward in Faith published a draft Measure which would ordain women as bishops and provide for traditionalists with a 'Third Province'. This was rejected by the majority of Synod members in 2008.

2006 the Bishop of Guildford's Working Group proposed provision in legislation for traditionalists by way of 'Transferred Episcopal Arrangements'. The majority of Synod members voted for the principle in 2006, but in 2008 the Synod motion to draw up women bishops legislation did not include it, and an amendment to introduce it failed to get enough votes to pass.

2010 the Archbishops of Canterbury and York proposed provision in legislation for traditionalists of 'coordinate jurisdiction'. The majority of Synod members voted for it, but it needed all three Houses of Synod to pass it and it got less than 50% support in the House of Clergy and so fell.

July 2012 the House of Bishops proposed provision in legislation for traditionalists in a 'clause 5(1)c', but the majority of Synod members voted to weaken that provision.

November 2012 all the previous motions to give traditionalists provision in legislation had not achieved the 50% votes to pass, and so the final text of the legislation did not include that provision, however, more than a third of the House of Laity had always voted for such provision. At Final Approval stage a two-thirds majority is required, and more than a third of the House of Laity voted against at Final Approval because the legislation did not include the provisions that had been sought.

At the 8 July 2013 Synod meeting, the motion put was for no provision for traditionalists in legislation. Several amendments were moved which would give some legislative provision. I voted in favour of every such amendment, but none achieved the 50% majority to pass. I made a speech in favour of one of those amendments, which was from the Revd Paul Benfield, "that the provision made for those who cannot receive the ministry of female priests or bishops should be made by Measure or regulations made under Canon". A shortened text of my speech:

"I agree with Bishop Pete about a broader Steering Group agreeing to the legislation, and a shortened synodical approval process.

To return to consideration of this amendment. At our church youth group two weeks ago, Suzanne our youth minister said to me, 'I hope General Synod sorts itself out so that we can get on and have women bishops.'

I said, 'Well, you remember it failed in November because a third of the House of Laity thought there wasn't enough provision for traditionalists? Well, the motion going to Synod in July is less provision than last time.'

Suzanne's heart sank, she could see the prospect of another failure.

But it doesn't have to be like that. If those who voted 'yes' in November, who would ideally prefer Option One, if you vote [for] Paul Benfield's amendment, you will guarantee that the legislation will pass at Final Approval. Because someone like me, who voted 'no' last time, will vote 'yes' at Final Approval. And even die-hard traditionalists have said that they would abstain to let such legislation pass.

I know that there is obviously concern about 'discrimination' in the Measure, but as Paul Benfield has explained, the episcopal ministry provision would be in Canon, so there would be no 'discrimination' on the face of the Measure."

The voting on that amendment was:

House of Bishops: 7 for; 34 against; 0 abstained

House of Clergy: 48 for; 137 against; 4 abstained

House of Laity: 75 for; 115 against; 4 abstained

As can be seen from those voting figures, more than a third of the House of Laity are still voting for provision for traditionalists in legislation.

The final motion was on the basis of no provision in legislation for traditionalists (other than a mandatory grievance procedure for parishes) but did include a welcome proposal from the Bishop of Willesden that the new Steering Group to draft the legislation should be broadly based; and an amendment from Keith Malcouronne of Guildford Diocese that the facilitated conversations should continue (I voted in favour of both those amendments). The vote on the final text of the motion was 319 for, 84 against, 22 abstained. I voted against because the final motion did not include legislative provision for traditionalists.

I feel we are repeating previous mistakes by embarking on women bishops legislation that does not include real legislative provision for traditionalists. I fear that the result will be either another failure at Final Approval in 2014/15; or it will pass at Final Approval and result in Church schism because the minority will not have been provided for in a way that meets their theological needs. The loss of the amendments has rather tied the hands of the Steering Group. I cannot see how they can draft legislation that can work for both sides when Synod has indicated they should not give provision in legislation. When I was a lad at

Guildford Crusaders we used to sing the song "I do not know what lies ahead". I feel that way now in that I can't see how a successful way forward is achievable on the path that Synod has now taken, and feel powerless to do anything about it. However, the song includes the line, "I'll trust the God of miracles, give to Him my all." All I can do therefore is try to trust the God of miracles - which is of course where I should have started, rather than it being my last resort!

Archbishop of Canterbury, Presidential Address

Archbishop Justin's address to Synod on 5 July included the following:

"trust is rebuilt and reconciliation happens when whatever we say, we do. For example, if, while doing what we believe is right for the full inclusion of women in the life of the church, we say that all are welcome whatever their views on that, all must be welcome in deed as well as in word. If we don't mean it, please let us not say it. On the one hand there are horrendous accounts from women priests whose very humanity has sometimes seemed to be challenged. On the other side I recently heard a well-attested account of a meeting between a Diocesan Director of Ordinands and a candidate, who was told that if the DDO had known of the candidate's views against the ordination of women earlier in the process he would never have been allowed to get as far as he did."

The full text of the address is on the Church of England website:

<http://www.churchofengland.org/media-centre/news/2013/07/archbishop-issues-call-for-church-revolution.aspx>

General Synod Questions

I submitted two questions.

Faculty Jurisdiction Rules

I submitted an amendment to make one of the questions on one of the new faculty application forms easier to understand. My amendment was passed. The new Rules and forms will come into force on 1 January 2014.

Safeguarding

The Synod passed a motion carried unanimously with no abstentions, which included an:

"unreserved apology for the failure of its systems to protect children, young people and adults from physical and sexual abuse inflicted by its clergy and others; and for the failure to listen properly to those so abused."

The debate began with a statement from the Stop Church Child Abuse Group challenging the Church to action not just words. The audio of the statement (begins 3 minutes 30 seconds in) is available

here: http://www.churchofengland.org/media/1796237/r09_0004.mp3

Welfare Reform and the Church

The motion that Synod passed included statements that were submitted by way of amendment such as calling on politicians "to consider whether the ring-fenced provision of universal benefits may be becoming the enemy of targeted benefits." Such statements were not covered in the background papers and I didn't feel I had the expertise to be certain about them, so I abstained.

Draft Dioceses of Bradford, Ripon and Leeds and Wakefield Reorganisation Scheme

Synod passed the Scheme. I voted in favour for the reasons given below.

Archbishops' Council 2014 Budget

The Budget was approved. I voted in favour because I considered a 0.8% increase to be reasonable.

Elections Review Group

This debate began but Synod ran out of time and it will be resumed in November.

Before General Synod July 2013: inviting your views

All the documents for the 5-9 July 2013 General Synod are on the Church of England website: <http://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/structure/general-synod/agendas-and-papers/july-2013-group-of-sessions.aspx>

Women Bishops (GS 1866)

On 6 July a day will be spent in groups of 20, each with a professional facilitator, to help us to listen to each other and seek to agree the direction for new legislation for the ordination of women bishops. There will then be a formal debate and votes on 8 July. I am encouraged that we will be having group discussions because up till now the 'dialogue' has been lobbying and campaigning before Synod, followed by a meeting of 480 people where people read out their speeches and then vote. I am hoping that the group discussions on 6 July where there is more sharing and listening, can enable a way forward together.

Unfortunately this prospect is rather hampered by the fact that the House of Bishops appears to have pre-judged the outcome by proposing the motion for 8 July that the Synod "...instruct the Steering Committee to prepare the draft legislation on the basis described in paragraphs 79-88 of the annex to GS 1886 as 'option one'" The Working Group paper GS 1886 actually offers four options, and it will be rather difficult for the small groups who might come to a consensus that another of the other options is best, to then have to seek to overturn the House of Bishops' motion.

Progress on Meeting Challenges for the Quinquennium (GS 1895, GSMisc1054 & GSMisc1048)

I draw your attention to two helpful websites:

resources for church growth <http://www.churchgrowthrd.org.uk/>

resources for Christian community action <http://www.how2help.net/>

The paper also refers to "Making New Disciples: the Growth of the Church of England" GS Misc 1054. Of interest, paragraph 32:

"Change can be accelerated if the different bodies communicate with each other, so that there can be mutual encouragement, learning and support about Church growth. For example, a deanery or diocesan synod can take time to listen to stories about new fresh expressions of church or the progress its churches are making in relation to their Mission Action Plans and draw out the principles of best practice."

and paragraph 50:

"If there is to be greater focus within the Church on making new disciples the primary need is for spiritual transformation - so that we are aligned with God's mission in the world - and cultural change so that the business of making new disciples has the highest priority in the agendas of the Church's leaders and decision-making bodies."

Faculty Jurisdiction Rules 2013 (GS 1887, GS 1887X)

This is a tidying-up and some simplification of the rules.

Draft Church of England (Miscellaneous Provisions) Measure (GS 1866A) and Draft Amending Canon No.31 (GS 1877A)

The Explanatory Memorandum GS 1866Y/1877Y explains the various technical changes to different pieces of Church legislation that are being proposed.

Page 21 refers to the representations that I had made to the Revision Committee where I said that the phrase "sede vacante" in the Draft Amending Canon No.31 was not a phrase that many churchgoers know the meaning of. I also asked for other technical terms to have a definition or explanation given. My representations were only partly successful. The report states:

"165. The Steering Committee was not in favour of replacing "sede vacante" with a different expression. It was a short and simple term and its meaning would not be any clearer if it was expressed differently. The Steering Committee was also concerned that the Canons should not contain commentary on their content. 166. The Committee voted by 10 votes to 1 in favour of retaining the expression "sede vacante". It voted against inserting explanations of other technical terms employed in the Canon. 167. Some members of the Committee nevertheless had sympathy with the points raised by Mr Vincent and requested that the Legal Office should produce a guidance note on the new Canon when it was promulgated."

Safeguarding: Follow-up to the Chichester Commissaries' Reports (GS 1896)

The report proposes changes to the Church's safeguarding procedures, following past failures in the Diocese of Chichester. The recommendations are summarised on page 16.

Page 7 invites anyone who wishes, to email in their views by 30 September.

I have made a submission, which is attached.

Welfare Reform and the Church (GS 1897)

This paper includes an informative annex from the Church Urban Fund explaining the welfare benefit changes that the Government are introducing.

Draft Dioceses of Bradford, Ripon and Leeds and Wakefield Reorganisation Scheme (GS 1898, GS 1898X, GS 1899, GS Misc 1049A/B/C & GS Misc 1050)

The proposal is to combine the three dioceses into a single diocese. It would produce financial savings; it would increase coherence (e.g. the city of Leeds is currently divided between four different dioceses); and it should increase capacity and expertise (e.g. rather than have three diocesan departments of education, you would have one larger one). Two of the dioceses are in favour, but the majority of Wakefield Diocesan Synod were against. I intend to vote in favour.

Archbishops' Council 2014 Budget (GS 1900 & GS 1913)

The Budget proposes that the cost of the national Church increase by 0.8% in 2014.

This is made up of a 3.3% increase in spending on training for ministry, and a 4.1% cut in national Church administration costs (see page 2).

Paragraph 19 states that since 2010 the number of staff in the national Church administration has been cut by 15%.

Although the increase will only be 0.8%, the increase charged to the Diocese of Guildford will be 2.2%, due to the diocesan allocations formula (see pages 35-36).

Elections Review Group (GS 1901 ...GS 1906, and GS 1902-1905X)

The key documents are pages 23-32 of GS 1901 and all of GS 1906.

Currently lay members of the General Synod are elected by those who are members of a Deanery Synod. The Elections Review Group considered the options for a.) the status quo; b.) having an electoral college; or c.) allowing everyone on the electoral roll to vote ('universal suffrage').

In 2011, I wrote to the Group and called for the universal suffrage option:

- attached is that document - staying true to my election promise.

The General Synod Business Committee, however, is proposing the electoral college option.

A member of Synod will be putting down an amendment to go for the universal suffrage.

I intend to support that amendment.

Attached are my thoughts in favour of the universal suffrage option.

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To: SafeguardingCDM@churchofengland.org

23 June 2013

Response to Consultation Paper on possible legislative changes arising out of the Chichester Commissaries' report. GS 1896

Paragraph 3 of the Annex to GS 1896 invites views on the issues raised in the paper. I write in my capacity as a lay member of the General Synod for the Guildford Diocese. I have no expertise in safeguarding issues. My only experience being as someone who helps out at my Church youth club and who has attended a short training session on safeguarding and who has read the Guildford Diocese Guide "In Safe Hands: A Guide to Safeguarding Children & Vulnerable Adults". I am writing prior to the General Synod debate on GS 1896 and may send in a supplementary submission in the light of that debate.

Taking the issues set out in the summary on paragraph 61:

- 1.) I AGREE with amending the Clergy Discipline Measure to remove the limitation period for a complaint alleging misconduct of a sexual nature involving a child (paragraph 9).

I note the legal difficulties with extending this to vulnerable adults (paragraph 10). I SUGGEST a way forward might be to ensure that published guidance on making a complaint which sets out that the President of Tribunals can consider complaints brought out of time where there is a good reason, should state that an example that may be considered a good reason might be a complaint of misconduct of a sexual nature against a vulnerable adult.

- 2.) I AGREE with amending the Clergy Discipline Measure to that the bishop has power to suspend a priest or deacon whenever a written application seeking permission to make a complaint out of time is submitted.
- 3.) I AGREE with amending canon law to enable the bishop to direct that a priest or deacon must submit to a risk assessment, and that failure to comply without good reason would amount to misconduct.

I DO NOT AGREE with paragraphs 35-36, the option to sack a cleric on the basis of that risk assessment. This is because (as explained in paragraphs 37 and 38) it would be wrong for a priest to be removed from office where there has been no hearing and no misconduct has been proved.

- 4.) I AGREE with amending canon law to prevent clergy from robing in church when they are prohibited under the CDM from exercising their orders; and also when they are suspended.
- 5.) I DO NOT AGREE with amending Canon C8 in the way envisaged.
I SUGGEST an alternative, that Canon C8.2 the words “seven days” be replaced by “one day”. This would enable, for example:
 - a Church of England parish with a mission link to an Anglican parish abroad, whose priest comes to visit their link parish in England for a week, would be able to robe or officiate in the Sunday services of that Church, without having to apply for a bishop’s license;
 - a Church of England parish who invites an ordained speaker from a mission society such as the Church Army; CMS; US etc – that speaker would be able to robe or officiate in the Sunday services of that church for the day of their visit.This allowance for one day rather than seven, should address the concern of Commissaries without requiring an additional layer of bureaucracy in circumstances of one-off visits.
- 6.) I AGREE with amending the Churchwardens Measure 2001 and the Church Representation Rules in the way proposed.

Yours faithfully,

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15 March 2011

To: The Clerk to the Synod

Comments to the Elections Review Group from Adrian Vincent (Guildford: 320)

Paragraph 2 of the Business Committee report GS 1817 invited comments on matters associated with the 2010 General Synod elections to be sent to the Clerk to the Synod.

I stood for General Synod for the first time in 2010. My election address <http://www.adrianvincent.org.uk/electionaddress.html> included the statement:

“2.) Increasing openness and participation

Before each Synod meeting I will list on my website the items coming up for debate at General Synod and invite you to send me your views. (I will have a mailing list for those without access to the internet). After each meeting I will publish on the website the decisions that were taken, how I voted and why. If I ever claim any expenses I will publish them on my website.

I will work for change to ensure that everyone on an electoral roll will have the right to vote for their General Synod representative.”

It is nearly a hundred years since universal suffrage was introduced in secular elections in the United Kingdom and I think it is wrong to deny the direct vote to Church members of their General Synod members.

I, and three of my fellow candidates in the House of Laity elections in the Guildford Diocese, were in the bizarre situation that we were entitled to stand for election - being on an electoral roll - but could not vote in our own election because we were not Deanery Synod members.

The current synodical structure can be retained, with Deanery and Diocesan Synods and with General Synod members reporting back through those bodies, and motions coming up and down the system. The only change I suggest is to widen the electorate for the General Synod representation.

I have looked at the report “Synodical Government in the Church of England: A Review” GS 1252, and paragraph 10.4 set out the good reasons in favour of universal suffrage. In subsequent paragraphs they stepped back from the idea on the grounds of: cost; difficulty for candidates to be known; and lack of interest. (They therefore proposed an establishment of synodical electors, which I feel was the wrong way forward, it would have set up sort of rotten boroughs and would have undermined the role of Deanery Synods, creating a parallel layer or representation).

The report was published in 1997. We are now in an age of the internet where the first two objections (cost and candidates difficulty in becoming known) can be more easily overcome. The Guildford Diocese paid to circulate one copy of every candidate's election address to Deanery Synod members. It is likely to be prohibitively expensive to do the same for all those on the electoral rolls. However, the Diocese of Bristol has already shown the way in having all election addresses and video presentations from each candidate on their website, and on-line hustings in addition to real hustings.

The third objection, that not many people would be interested in voting. I would argue that it is wrong to refuse to grant rights to people on the grounds that not many people will choose to exercise their rights. Most electoral roll members are unlikely to take much interest in General Synod elections, but it will mean Church members who do take an interest will be able to directly have their say.

Yours sincerely,

Adrian Vincent

9 July 2013 General Synod meeting: critique of Agenda item 30, proposal that lay members of General Synod should be elected by an electoral college (rejecting the suggestion of universal suffrage of all on the electoral roll).

Arguments that were used 100 years ago against women being able to vote for their MP, are being used today by the Business Committee against electoral roll members being given the direct vote for their General Synod member.

1.) The argument that women then, or the laity today, are not interested in getting the vote:

100 years ago: "the vast majority of women have no desire for the vote."¹

Today: "to enfranchise everyone on the electoral roll and then only to achieve a small turnout could... be a waste of time" GS1901, page 28.

2.) The argument that women then, or the laity today, are too ignorant to choose the best person:

100 years ago: "He was too fond of [women] to drag them into the political arena and to ask them to undertake responsibilities, duties, and obligations which they did not understand."²

Today: "It is questionable whether universal suffrage would be the best way of identifying individuals who would be suited to [...] membership of the Synod." GS1901, page 28.

3.) The argument that having an influence on someone else who has the vote is sufficient:

100 years ago: "'Women are already represented by their husbands."³

Today: "the responsibility of electing the General Synod is sufficiently important for it to be in the hands of those who are specially elected by parishes for that purpose" GS 1906 para 12.

¹ Grace Saxon Mills, writing in the years before 1914.

Source www.johndclare.net/Women1_ArgumentsAgainst.htm

² Mr Cremer, speech in Parliament on 25 April 1906. Quoted in http://www.johndclare.net/Women1_EvansArguments.htm

³ Colin Shephard and Rosemary Rees, *British Society in Change 1906-1918* (2002) quoted in www.johndclare.net/Women1_ArgumentsAgainst.htm

4.) The argument that women then, or laity today, haven't done enough to earn the right to vote:

100 years ago: "The exact numbers of women who were serving in public capacities [is very small]... It shows a very undue reluctance to take advantage of the considerable opportunities which at this moment are offered to them"⁴

Today: "the election of those who are to serve on the General Synod [...] should be in the hands of those who have chosen to signal some degree of commitment to the Church of England beyond mere residence." GS 1906 para 15 (in other words, church members who join the electoral roll have no real commitment to the Church of England).

5.) The argument is used today that universal suffrage would be too administratively complex "establishing and maintaining a register of qualified electors would be a very substantial task" GS 1906 para 17 (this is despite the fact that GS 1901 page 29 reports that the Electoral Reform Services says it would cost £500-£600 per diocese to set up, and that the Research and Statistics Department report that "a data capture system has already been introduced across some dioceses").

I haven't found that argument used 100 years ago against registering women to vote on the grounds that it would be a large administrative burden. Perhaps 100 years ago they considered it too weak an argument to deploy!

Positive arguments for universal suffrage

The papers accept:

"Universal suffrage is the most democratic option. It is also the most representative option. ...Universal suffrage would enable a wider sense of ownership and involvement in the Church." GS1901 page 28.

"the universal suffrage option would be the most democratic and inclusive and would reach the most diverse membership." GS1906 para 16.

Given the weaknesses of the arguments against, the positive arguments should be decisive.

Adrian Vincent
Guildford Diocese, 320.

⁴ Mr Baker, speech in Parliament 28 March 2012. Quoted in http://www.johndclare.net/women_debate_1912.htm