

## After General Synod February 2014: reporting back

The Church of England website: <http://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/structure/general-synod/agendas-and-papers/february-2014-group-of-sessions.aspx> has all the papers and the "Business Done" which is the list of the motions passed and the votes taken. The transcript of the debates are in the "Report of Proceedings" <http://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/structure/general-synod/reports-of-proceedings.aspx>

### Gender-Based Violence (GS 1933)

Mandy Marshall from Restored <http://www.restoredrelationships.org/> suggested some practical actions for churches such as: posters on the back of church lavatory doors with contact details of help groups; awareness training; and speaking out to break the shame of silence.

### Women bishops (GS 1932, GS 1925A, GS 1926A, GS 1934, GS Misc 1064, GS Misc 1068)

In the general debate the great majority of speeches were fully in support of the new package. Some conservative evangelicals expressed continuing concern: their theological conviction of male headship would have difficulty being maintained when making the oath of canonical obedience to a woman bishop; or receiving a male traditionalist bishop appointed by a female diocesan bishop. Also, the undertaking in the House of Bishops' Declaration that there should be at least one conservative evangelical bishop in the Church of England has yet to be acted upon. That said, I think there is just enough provision to enable conservative evangelicals to stay in the Church of England.

Synod passed the motion, "That this Synod welcome the draft House of Bishops' Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests and the draft Resolution of Disputes Procedure Regulation as set out in GS 1932." I voted in favour. I also subsequently voted in favour of the draft Measure and Amending Canon.

Then was the debate on rescinding the Episcopal Ministry Act of Synod 1993. Attached is the speech that I gave raising my concern on that subject, the reply from the Bishop of Rochester, and relevant extracts of the Presidential address from the Archbishop of Canterbury.

### Parochial Fees (GS 1937)

The Synod voted for an uplift at the rate of inflation (RPI) for the next five years for parochial fees. An amendment proposing a lesser uplift was defeated. (I voted for the motion and against the amendment).

### Church Representation Rules (GS 1940, GS 1940X)

A debacle! The Archbishops' Council's Simplification Group had proposed removing some of the prescriptive rules: to reduce the minimum number of PCC meetings a year; to remove the requirement to posting notice of PCC meeting dates on the church door; and removing the restriction on any other business on PCC agendas.

To the proposed simplifications, ten amendments were put down by different Synod members, five of which were passed. Although most of the amendments passed were reasonable, the combined result was that the Rules which we were supposed to be simplifying ended up more complicated than when we had started, and Synod had to vote to adjourn to look at it again in July!

### Safeguarding (GS 1941)

The Synod passed the motion, "That this Synod request that draft legislation be brought forward to give effect to the proposals for legislative change set out in GS 1941." The opportunity to write in to the Revision Committee will be after the July Synod, where detailed draft legislation will be considered.

### **Environmental Issues** (GS 1942A, GS 1942B)

Synod debated a Southwark Diocesan Synod motion on the environment. Synod voted 274 in favour and 1 against a motion that stated, amongst other things, we have a "responsibility to care for the planet". Whilst I supported the motion, it is one of those debates where everyone is in agreement from the start and we feel we have achieved something by passing a motion.

### **House of Bishops' Working Group report on human sexuality** (GS 1929)

Sir Joseph Pilling gave a presentation on the report of his working group, after which there was an opportunity for questions (no debate was permitted). The Archbishop of Canterbury referred to the report in his Presidential Address:

We have received a report with disagreement in it on sexuality, through the group led by Sir Joseph Pilling. There is great fear among some, here and round the world, that that will lead to the betrayal of our traditions, to the denial of the authority of scripture, to apostasy, not to use too strong a word. And there is also a great fear that our decisions will lead us to the rejection of LGBT people, to irrelevance in a changing society, to behaviour that many see akin to racism. Both those fears are alive and well in this room today. We have to find a way forward that is one of holiness and obedience to the call of God and enables us to fulfil our purposes. This cannot be done through fear. How we go forward matters deeply, as does where we arrive.

Three days after the Synod the House of Bishops issued a statement of Pastoral Guidance on Same Sex Marriage <http://www.churchofengland.org/media-centre/news/2014/02/house-of-bishops-pastoral-guidance-on-same-sex-marriage.aspx>

Some fringe meetings that I attended:

### **Evangelical Group of General Synod**

Sam Follett spoke about a new website, The Bridge, <http://www.thebridge-uk.com/> which: provides one place for young people to receive an extensive range of good quality teaching, in a variety of forms. This teaching is to be relevant and applicable to the reality of life as a young person today. At the heart of this is to facilitate engagement between Church leadership and young people.

### **Presentation by Anglican International Development**

On the excellent work that this charity is doing in South Sudan <http://interanglicanaid.org/>

### **Talk by John Spence, Chair of the Finance Committee, at the Open Synod Group**

Mr Spence gave some insights from his management and Board experience: consider every available option; make your decision on the basis of evidence not anecdote or speculation; and then align every resource to achieve it. Applying this to the Church, if we have as a goal, for the risen Christ to become central in our country and for renewed spiritual lives and growth, we should ask what resources we need and how to we align our resources to achieve it. He also spoke about the need to measure the effectiveness of ministerial education. The Church has been obsessed with going for the cheapest option, thinking it is the most cost effective, but the two are not the same.

## Before General Synod February 2014: inviting your views

All the documents for the 10-12 February 2014 General Synod are on the Church of England website: <http://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/structure/general-synod/agendas-and-papers/february-2014-group-of-sessions.aspx>

### Church growth research findings

Not on the Synod agenda, but the report published on 16 January, *"From Anecdote to Evidence: Findings from the Church Growth Research Programme 2011-13"*

<http://www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk/report> should be of interest to parishes.

The research findings list the factors that are present in growing churches.

### Gender-Based Violence (GS 1933)

The paper includes links to resources and suggestions for what dioceses, deaneries and parishes can do, such as more information and training - see paragraphs 4 and 23.

### Women Bishops (GS 1932, GS 1925A, GS 1926A, GS 1934, GS Misc 1064, GS Misc 1068)

The General Synod will undertake the Revision Stage of the draft *"Bishops and Priests (Consecration and Ordination of Women) Measure"* (GS 1925A) and the draft *"Amending Canon No.33"* (GS 1926A). The draft Measure and Canon are the simple legal changes required to ordain women as bishops, and don't include provisions for traditionalists. There is little here for General Synod to argue over. I expect those documents to pass the Revision Stage unamended.

There is likely to be more debate on the documents that include the provisions for traditionalists. The existing provisions for traditionalist parishes were introduced in 1993 when the legislation to ordain women as priests was passed. Those provisions are in two places, and both documents are proposed to be rescinded:

- 1.) The "Priests (Ordination of Women) Measure 1993" which enables a parish to pass Resolutions A or B if they want a male priest.
- 2.) The "1993 Episcopal Ministry Act of Synod" which enables a parish to ask their diocesan bishop for extended episcopal oversight from a Provincial Episcopal Visitor - a traditionalist 'flying bishop'.

Clause 1(3) of the draft Measure (GS 1925A) would rescind the 1993 Measure, and the proposal to Synod in February is also to set in motion the rescinding of the 1993 Act of Synod. In their place would be the draft House of Bishops Declaration (Annex A of GS 1932). One concern I have with this proposal is that, whilst the current 1993 Act of Synod states:

*"no person or body shall discriminate against candidates either for ordination or for appointment to senior office in the Church of England on the grounds of their view or positions about the ordination of women to the priesthood."*

That provision would be replaced by paragraph 12 of the draft House of Bishops Declaration:

*"dioceses are entitled to express a view, in the statement of needs prepared during a vacancy in see, as to whether the diocesan bishop should be someone who will or will not ordain women."*

In probably every diocese, the majority fully support the ordination of women and would therefore state in a vacancy that their next diocesan bishop must be someone who ordains women. The result of that would be that never again in the Church of England would a

traditionalist be appointed as a diocesan bishop. This does not seem to be the "mutual flourishing" that the draft Declaration states as its intention. However, there is little prospect of paragraph 12 of the draft Declaration being amended. Therefore, perhaps the best that traditionalists could hope for is that when diocesan Vacancy in See Committees express a view that their next bishop should be someone who ordains women, they don't impose a blanket ban on traditionalist candidates, but instead still consider each individual on their merits.

### **Safeguarding** (GS 1941)

The paper proposes legislative changes to tighten up safeguarding procedures. There will be a general debate at Synod, after which people can write in to a Revision Committee with suggestions for amendment. I intend to write in regarding paragraph 77, the proposal to enable a bishop to suspend a licensed lay reader or licensed lay worker. I would like that amended to say that before taking such a step, the bishop must take legal advice from the diocesan registrar. It is already proposed that before suspending a priest, that the bishop must consult the registrar - see paragraph 74.ii. My suggestion is to treat lay ministers with no less care.

### **Clergy Robes** (GS 1944A, GS 1944B)

The Church of England rule, Canon C8, states that "At the Holy Communion, the presiding minister shall wear surplice or alb with scarf or stole." The Synod will be debating a motion to change the rule so that it "becomes optional rather than mandatory." I would be interested to receive people's views on this.

### **Parochial Fees** (GS 1937, GS 1937X)

A new fees system for marriages, baptisms and funerals was introduced in January last year after a lot of controversy and debate. The proposal this year is for the fees simply to be increased by inflation for the next couple of years. I would be interested to hear people's experience of how the new fee regime has worked and whether additional changes are needed (7 February is the deadline to submit amendments). Some think that the burial fee is too low to cover the cost of churchyard maintenance. Others have said that the rule that when a priest takes a funeral in another parish, £21 has to be paid over to the PCC of that parish, is unnecessary bureaucracy and not fair on those who have undertaken the funeral ministry.

## Adrian Vincent's speech at the 11 February 2014 General Synod debate on rescinding the 1993 Episcopal Ministry Act of Synod, the reply from the Bishop of Rochester, and address by the Archbishop of Canterbury

### Background

The existing provisions for traditionalist parishes were introduced in 1993 when the legislation to ordain women as priests was passed. One of those was the 1993 Episcopal Ministry Act of Synod, which enables a parish to ask their diocesan bishop for extended episcopal oversight from a Provincial Episcopal Visitor - a traditionalist 'flying bishop'. The new proposals to ordain women as bishops include rescinding the 1993 Measure and replacing it with the provisions in the draft House of Bishops Declaration (Annex A of GS 1932). A concern I have is that, whilst the current 1993 Act of Synod states:

no person or body shall discriminate against candidates either for ordination or for appointment to senior office in the Church of England on the grounds of their view or positions about the ordination of women to the priesthood.

That provision would be replaced by paragraph 12 of the draft House of Bishops Declaration: dioceses are entitled to express a view, in the statement of needs prepared during a vacancy in see, as to whether the diocesan bishop should be someone who will or will not ordain women.

In probably every diocese, the majority fully support the ordination of women and would therefore state in a vacancy that their next diocesan bishop must be someone who ordains women. The result of that would be that never again in the Church of England would a traditionalist be appointed as a diocesan bishop. As a consequence, the "mutual flourishing" which is the stated intention of the five principles in the draft House of Declaration would fail to be achieved.

### Adrian Vincent General Synod speech

I too agree that the Act of Synod is necessary to go, and that the five principles in the House of Bishops' Declaration are a better way forward for mutual flourishing. However, I would like to explore a little bit further an area of this that was touched today in speeches by Christina Baron, Gerry O'Brien and the Bishop of Rochester.

The Act of Synod currently says, "no person or body shall discriminate against candidates either for ordination or for appointment to senior office in the Church of England on the grounds of their view or positions about the ordination of women to the priesthood." That is going to go, and it's going to be replaced by paragraph 12 of the House of Bishops' Declaration, which allows a diocese in the Statement of Needs to specify that they want a bishop who does ordain women.

Christina Baron said that she hopes that the bench of bishops will still include people of many integrities (and that's the aspiration in paragraph 13 of the Declaration), but she welcomes the provision in paragraph 12 because at last dioceses can be honest and open and don't have to sneakily find out about a candidate's position.

Gerry O'Brien's concern was that, given that in the Church of England, the majority of people are strongly supportive of the ordination of women, we could have a situation where *every* diocese makes a statement that their diocesan bishop must be one who ordains women. And there is no reference in paragraph 12 to a diocesan bishop having to consider making a suffragan bishop, or other episcopal provision for the traditionalists within their diocese, and he was concerned about the lack of reciprocity there.

The reply of the Bishop of Rochester was to draw our attention back to the five principles and the intention of mutual flourishing and how this will address that

concern. But I think that some more work or consideration does need to be given in this area because if every diocese states that their diocesan bishop must be someone who ordains women, and then if, going by past history, all or the extreme majority of diocesan bishops then appoint suffragan bishops of a like mind, and there is then only the three PEVs for traditionalists and the one conservative evangelical, then the aspiration of the paragraph 13 and the five principles cannot be given effect. So how does referring back to the five principles actually help in that situation?

### The Bishop of Rochester's reply to the debate included:

Adrian Vincent raised again the issue which arises out particularly of paragraph 12 of the House of Bishops' draft Declaration, about the position of diocesan bishops, and he raised the situation which might arise whereby all diocesan bishops are those who will ordain women rather than those who won't. So it is the question of the supply, as it were, of appropriate bishops. And I think that's something that's very difficult because of the way bishops are appointed by different bodies, and different people have a stake in it, for us to think we can kind of micro-manage that process to bring out a particular solution. Which is why you've got in effect a commitment on behalf of the House to ensure that supply, without being able to specify the detail about how that supply would be assured. Again, I'm conscious, it's asking us to trust one another. That's really what lies at the heart of a lot of this, and I hope we can proceed on the basis of that trust.

### The Archbishop of Canterbury's Presidential Address on 12 February included:

if we are to live out a commitment to the flourishing of every tradition of the church there is going to have to be a massive cultural change that accepts that people with whom I differ deeply are also deeply loved by Christ and therefore must be deeply loved by me and love means seeking their flourishing.

[...] Culture change is always threatening, and when we talk about implementing the five principles, including the one that seeks the flourishing of every part of the Church, and thus of appointments of people who disagree with us most profoundly all sorts of objections can be raised. "What would a church flourish if it appointed men who do not ordain women to senior posts, simply because in other respects those appointing sense the call and purpose of God?" What would the world think? The Church's answer has to be "the world may think what it likes, we are seeking mutual flourishing". Even as I say it my heart beats faster with concern about the consequences and with fear of the difficulty of climbing such a steep slope. And "how can those who are deeply and theologically committed to the idea that women should not be ordained as Bishops, how can they flourish?" I can see the answer only in the grace and love of God in a church that risks living out its call. It is a hard course to steer. Yet I know it is right that we set such a course and hold to it through thick and thin, with integrity, transparency and honesty.

Yet what lies on that journey? Well, it is certainly an untidy church. It has incoherence, inconsistency between dioceses and between different places. It's not a church that says we do this and we don't do that. It's a church that says we do this and we do that and actually quite a lot of us don't like that but we are still going to do it because of love. It's a church that speaks to the world and says that consistency and coherence is not the ultimate virtue, that is found in holy grace.

A church that loves those with whom the majority deeply disagree is a church that will be unpleasantly challenging to a world where disagreement is either banned within a given group or removed and expelled. The absolute of holy grace challenges the absolutism of a world that says there are no absolutes expect the statement that there are no absolutes.

The Church of England is not tidy, nor efficiently hierarchical. There are no popes, but there is a College of Bishops and there are Synods and collections and lobbies and groups and pressure and struggle. When it works well it works because love overcomes fear. When it works badly it is because fear overcomes love. The resources for more fear lie within us and the resources for more love lie within God and are readily available to all those who in repentance and humility stretch out and seek them. With Jesus every imperative rests on an indicative, every command springs from a promise. Do not fear. [...] Let's bring this down to some basics. We have agreed that we will ordain women as Bishops. At the same time we have agreed that while doing that we want all parts of the church to flourish. If we are to challenge fear we have to find a cultural change in the life of the church, in the way our groups and parties work, sufficient to build love and trust. That will mean different ways of working at every level of the church in practice in the way our meetings are structured, presented and lived out and in every form of appointment. It will, dare I say, mean a lot of careful training and development in our working methods, because the challenge for all institutions today, and us above all, is not merely the making of policy but how we then make things happen.