

General Synod July 2019

One of the ecumenical guests, the Rt Revd Elov Westergaard, Bishop of Ribe from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark, addressed us. He spoke of a denomination, like so many others in Europe, in gradual decline and yet his was a message of hope. First and foremost his was a church of praise, but one that also seeks to engage with society and preach with relevance on the issues of the day.

Business Committee Report. Often a very lively affair, on this occasion it was rather muted with only five contributions from the floor. One referred to the new Synod App and another, noting the increasingly frequent request for debates at Deanery and PCC levels, requested the production of short briefing papers to facilitate such debate. However, it was the two calls for a proper debate on safeguarding rather than the scheduled presentation that set the tone. These led to an intervention from the Archbishop of Canterbury who spoke of his deep shame about the past and the need for a change of culture in the Church. He gave three reasons why the requested debate was inappropriate at this time: IICSA was in the middle of hearings into the Church of England and a General Synod debate could result in accusations of attempting to distract attention; many dioceses are still in the midst of hearing from survivors; and it is important to see and consider the IICSA report itself before such a debate. The final speaker felt that what was required at present was to listen rather than speak.

Synod welcomed the **Worldwide President of the Mothers' Union**, Sheran Harper, to speak. She lifted the sombre mood of synod with an upbeat presentation. We heard about the wonderful work its 4 million members spread over 80 countries are carrying out, including delivering parenting programmes and empowering women as they share the love of Jesus through tea and cake! Her speech was inspirational and Sheran received a standing ovation. Also check out the MU church and community development 'metamorphosis' www.mothersunion.org/projects/metamorphosis

We heard about the proposed **Covenant for clergy care and wellbeing**. A dramatic presentation of the issues was followed by a debate on the report of the Working group. Clergy in the county will hear more about this at the Ministerial Development day in October. The motion, which included a call for the Covenant to be "affirmed and proclaimed an Act of Synod", was overwhelmingly approved.

Synod approved a motion encouraging the dioceses to support well qualified refugees practicing their professions in the UK.

Synod passed various items of **legislative business**: Canon 39, which amongst other things removed the requirement for Morning and Evening Prayer to be said daily in every parish church. In future the obligation will be limited to every benefice. Final approval was given last February and having received Royal Assent it was now 'made, promulgated and executed'. Miscellaneous Provisions Measure and Canon 41. These included: provision of a National Ministry Register; changes related to funerals conducted by lay people; new rules about electronic parish registers; and replacing outdated titles such as 'Prolocutor' with 'Chair'. And so the Church of England gradually modernises itself. There was a first consideration of a draft Diocesan Boards of Education Measure, to update the current 1991 Measure.

Archbishop Sentamu, gave his final presidential address as he will retire before Synod's next visit to York. He began by quoting from the 2010 Presidential address of Rowan Williams. "I sense that in the last few years the debate on sexuality has not really moved much." Dr Sentamu reflected that since then there had been little or no progress, before offering some pointers to solving the dilemma. There was a need, he said, to put ourselves in the shoes of those on the other side of the argument which would require us "to believe that God is leading your opponent, too, on the pilgrimage of faith seeking understanding, and that it lies within the mind and purpose of God to reveal the points of authentic convergence for those who start from different initial experiences. The power of faith seeking understanding is nourished by reading and engaging with the whole of Scripture and Scripture as a whole." This would enable us, he went on, "to re-frame the questions that the world puts to us in Jesus Christ shaped ways; and even if we did not immediately agree on their solution, we shall agree on the kind of approach they demanded of us. To disagree Christianly requires a common Scriptural perception of what is foundational." We were called, he said to unity and humility, but must be reconciled to God before we can reconcile others. A true witness to the Gospel is "one who can dare to say to others: follow me, as I am following Jesus. What matters is ... that people should grow in holiness, wisdom and love. For the life of Jesus Christ was not written: it was lived." He concluded, that it is the "gift of humbleness of mind and oneness in Jesus Christ that will enable us to live a Jesus Christ-shaped life. This is discipleship ... living in unity and humility ... lives that are Jesus Christ shaped ... and when we disagree, to disagree Christianly." (<https://www.archbishopofyork.org/news/news-2019/presidential-address-general-synod-july-2019>)

One of the debates that hit the national press ahead of synod was on **serious youth violence**, a subject symbolically portrayed in the reclaimed knife sculptures, the Knife Angel and the Luton Phoenix. The motion called on the Church to contribute to strategies to tackle the problem, whilst much of the discussion was on the impact of school exclusion orders. The motion was passed unanimously with 315 votes in favour.

Saturday afternoon was devoted to the *Living in Love and Faith* project. Through a series of workshops and interactive seminars, we were brought up to date with the progress made in producing the resources related to sexuality promised for next year. We chose three from the five possible options. The Bible workshop, considered real examples of the issues as we travelled the road to Emmaus, ending with an opportunity to write down our thoughts. *How Do We Hear God?* A number of questions were asked: How does God speak through Scripture, the Church, and people's convictions formed by faith and experience? Can the teaching of the Church change and develop? Why do we seem to hear God differently? The second, *Who Are We?*, considered how the Christian story from creation to redemption relates to sexual relationships, gender identity, diversity and inclusion. *Where Are We?* considered how sexuality, gender, sexual identity, family and procreation are affected by social and cultural shifts, and a workshop that considered the revised Pastoral Principles.

Sunday afternoon we looked at safeguarding issues, first with related questions and then a presentation, which included a moving contribution from survivor, Phil Johnson. His message seemed to be that the Church of England had improved its handling of safeguarding issues and allegations of abuse, but the job was not yet complete. There was a distinct feeling that Synod had not properly aired the issues, but with the Church of England giving evidence in the IICSA hearings the following week it was difficult to see what more could have been done at this Group of Sessions.

There was a first consideration of the draft Cathedrals Measure; approval of amendments to the Faculty Jurisdiction Rules; final approval of Canon 40 to make provision for the formal recognition of religious communities in the Church of England; a presentation on the Archbishops' Council; and the appointment of Maureen Cole as a member of the Archbishops' Council.

We had a presentation of the National Church Spending Plans before approving the Archbishops' Council Budget for 2020. This was followed by final approval of the Miscellaneous Provisions Measure and Amending Canon 41 that had completed its final drafting stage on Friday.

Synod celebrated fifteen years since the Mission-Shaped Church report was launched and the thousands of fresh expressions of church that have been planted over the period.

The diocese of Rochester has developed a project to set up 'Anna chaplaincies' – named for the elderly widow who recognised the Christ-child in the Temple. The [Rochester paper](#) is well worth a read, and there is a useful [background paper](#) here. Anyone who has elderly and frail people in their congregation (or who have 'disappeared' from normal attendance because of frailty) might want to read them. Our Dementia Project is different but is tackling some similar issues.

Seven whole days, not one in seven **Setting God's People free** is the title of a report which took the focus away from clergy to re-awaken interest in lay discipleship. It is about living out discipleship between Monday and Saturday. There are some elements within it that have been widely picked up (in church...) such as "this time tomorrow" – a moment in a church service when someone speaks about their everyday life and where their faith intersects with it. We've heard a lot about clericalism in the C of E, and introducing the debate, Dr Jamie Harrison reminded us that *Setting God's People Free* is not about getting laypeople to take things on to release clergy. It is about all the people of God taking up 'intentional discipleship'. He said that often lay people have been consumers of religion, taking what the clergy and organisation gives them on Sunday. And some clergy only regard the laity through the lens of what they do for the church, rather than in their everyday lives. And he remarked that even when ordinary church people get involved in wider discipleship, somehow it often ends up as 'more people doing more churchy things'.

Synod bid farewell to the Bishop of Hereford and the Secretary of the Church Commissioners who were attending General Synod for the final time.

Sunday at the Minster, the **Archbishop of Canterbury** preached on the sending out of the 70 disciples recounted in Luke 10. He reminded us that like the 70, "we are going to meet wolves if we challenge sin, evil structures and are faithful in proclaiming the claims of Christ". We are being sent, he said, into a world "of divisions such as we have not seen in peace time for so many years, on so great a scale". He spoke of "a crisis of the spirit of the nation", which goes well beyond Brexit with concerns about social care, inequality, injustice, climate change and much more that impacts our values as a country. The question, he asked was "what will the Church of England do?" If we are to be healers, he spoke of the need "to recognise the depth of the wounds in our society. It requires us to listen to pain, share in it, to be vulnerable". He also warned us that "if we retreat from the world we betray our calling and our Lord." He ended by challenging us at "a moment of calling, a time for renewed vocation ... to live generously in the Spirit of God ... We may be wounded healers in a wounded country but we bring the hope of our healing and our country's healing, we bring the message of reconciliation." (<https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/speaking-writing/sermons/archbishop-canterburys-sermon-york-minster>)

Closer Unity with the Methodist Church 'Mission and Ministry in Covenant' proposes closer union with the Methodist church. The vision of the covenant is to enable an interchange of ministries between Church of England and Methodist clergy, something that has not been possible since the parting of the ways between Anglicans and Methodists in the late eighteenth century. Overall, people are generally very positive about closer unity, but there are some concerns. Primarily, (from some in the Church of England) these centre on the nature of priesthood, and the importance of being ordained by a Bishop. Put bluntly, are Methodist ministers really priests. The Methodists have said that they will make their leaders Bishops, but this still doesn't satisfy everyone. Added to this are new concerns from some about the Methodists moving towards allowing same sex marriages in their churches. Cameron's amendment focusing the proposal on Mission was carried. Synod voted to give everyone more time to think about these things, this is very frustrating for us in Cumbria. There had been a plan to start turning the proposals into legislation from next February, but this has now been extended to sometime in the next quinquennium (that's the five year period that each Synod lasts between elections). With a year left of this Synod, that gives us up to six more years to ponder. No one could accuse the Church of England of rushing these things, but in our ecumenical county we will press on.

Part of the simplification work was the **Legislative Reform Order**, it enables much speedier reform of many of our procedures by avoiding us having to put new Measures through so frequently and comes in the centenary year of the 'Enabling Act' of 1919, which freed the C of E to make certain decisions without Parliamentary involvement. This particular Order aims to remove some of the administrative and financial burdens associated with filling vacant clergy posts – that is, finding and installing a new parish priest. So there is some streamlining of the current formal processes to speed things up, including:

The Bishop must start the process off no later than the day that a benefice becomes vacant.

A 'start date' is established when the clock starts ticking for all the various consultations that have to take place.

The PCC's 'Section 11' meeting (some readers will know what this is) has long been under the pressure of unrealistic timetables. So that has been simplified out now, with different timescales, such as giving the PCC one deadline (up to 6 months) to carry out their duties.

Where there are multiple patrons for parishes, the new Rules offer ways of keeping things simpler. It will now be legal to use email for these processes.

Summing up his introduction, Simon Butler, suggested that the Order is about 'Setting PCC Secretaries Free'.