

**General Synod
July 2008
University of York**

**Welcome to this edition of the
Ely General Synod Digest.**

Licensed Lay Ministry

A new report from the 'Reader's Board' was brought before Synod and we have been encouraged to discuss it in our parishes, deaneries & in our Diocese.

The Report was accepted, though somewhat unexpectedly, 23 laity, 27 clergy and 2 Bishops voted against it and 6 Bishops, 16 Clergy and 12 Lay people recorded abstentions. There are a number of theories on this... Amongst other things, the Report highlighted the low morale among many of the 10 000 Readers in the Church, often caused by being underused or because of a role uncertainty in a church where many authorised lay ministry schemes have burgeoned.

There was widespread support given to Readers & their possible new title (Licensed Lay Ministers) though specific details of the report such as this were not dealt with in detail. A follow up report which will be more widely circulated is expected to follow soon.

Women Bishops

The visitors' gallery was packed and the press were out in force as Synod held two debates on the tricky subject of Women Bishops. Following small group discussions, the first debate, on Saturday, dealt with the general issues raised by the Manchester report which looks at the various possible provisions the church might make for those who in conscience could not receive the ministry of a woman bishop. On Monday a gruelling session, starting at 2.30pm and finishing at 10.15pm, with a short dinner break in between, tackled the nitty-gritty of which option we were going to pursue. There were 14 amendments and endless technical points of order and votes by houses (Bishops, Clergy & Laity voting separately). The motion, brought to Synod by the majority of the Bishops, asked for a simple, single measure, backed up with a code of practice. However, traditionalists were intent on securing a separate 'diocese', which would not be geographical but would have jurisdiction over parishes where the ministry of women was not accepted. Others supported the idea of delegated functions being given to certain Bishops. In an increasingly emotional debate impassioned pleas were made by all sides. In the end, Synod voted for a substantially unaltered measure, backed by a 'statutory' code of practice. The voting was: Bishops: For 28, Against 12; Clergy: For 124, Against 44; Laity: For 111, Against 68.

The vote was received in silence. Some were thankful to God for another step nearer women bishops. Others wept, believing the church they loved no longer held a place for them. This is not, of course, the end of the matter. The working group will now draft legislation for consideration in February. At some stage it will come to the Diocese for approval. Final approval, needing a 2/3rds majority in each house, will not be until after the 2010 General Synod elections which, will no doubt, become a referendum on the issue.

Some goodbyes and Some welcomes.

With sadness the Synod said goodbye to the Bishop of St. Albans, the Vicar General of York who has sat on Synod ever since its inception in 1970 and Sir Alan Bridgewater who has steered the C of E through the recent pensions debate. All three are due to retire.

Some new members were welcomed to Synod and visitors from the German Lutheran Church, the Methodist Church, Bishops from the Melanesian Church and students from some of the theological colleges were all welcomed at different points in the proceedings.

Church Tourism

A private member's motion sought to encourage the Church to take tourism more seriously and to work in partnership with the Churches Regional Commissions, Government bodies and others to promote visits to churches and to encourage people to discover them as places of prayer, worship & mission. Look out for the 'Sacred Britain' booklet which aims to promote this strategy.

Anglican- Orthodox Relations

The Synod opened by considering Anglican-Orthodox relations in the form of the agreed statement of the international commission *The Church of the Triune God*. This began with an address by the eminent Orthodox theologian, John Zizioulas. There was particular celebration of the work of the Holy Spirit through whom we walk together on a journey of increasingly shared understanding. Several speakers reminded members that the presence of Orthodox Christians in this country is growing rapidly at the moment and that this work is therefore practically as well as theologically relevant. One speaker described the work that he had shared in his inner city Devon church with the Orthodox priest and congregation who worshipped in his church.

Anglican- Methodist Relations

The Synod discussed the report at the end of five years' work by the Joint Implementation Commission (JIC). There were some encouraging stories of joint working particularly by Methodist circuits and Anglican deaneries and this was contrasted by one speaker with the narrowness of the membership of the Implementation Commission itself. One bishop spoke, nevertheless, of an LEP which is engaged in vital work in a challenging community but is frustrated by the cumbersomeness of the institutional systems for recognising its work. Some felt that radically new approaches will be needed at the next stage of this work.

Faith, Work and Economic Life

General Synod passed a motion which affirmed work, paid and unpaid, as a spiritual activity and recognised the importance of Christian values in economic life. Synod will return to this at a later date. Meanwhile Bishops and clergy will be encouraged to place work issues higher up their priority list particularly where preaching and visiting is concerned.

Clergy Terms of Service

At last the 'Clergy Terms of Service' Measure achieved final approval. Under this scheme almost all clergy will have 'Common Tenure'. This means that clergy will remain office holders rather than becoming employees. It will provide much greater protection for those who are currently team vicars, team rectors or hold other posts under Bishop's licence. It will no longer be possible summarily to dismiss such clergy & they will have the right to an employment tribunal if they feel unfairly treated. Clergy who already have freehold will be able to opt into the scheme, or can keep their freehold for as long as they stay in their present post. One great source of contention was what would happen to parsonage houses and church buildings, both of which are currently invested in the Incumbent. Plans to transfer these to Diocesan Boards of Finance have now been scrapped and they will remain with of the Office holder. It may take a while, but, if you are a vicar, one of these days, a letter will arrive offering you Common Tenure. I strongly encourage you to take it. I certainly will! AH

Do you have a question you are burning to ask?

Contact your synod reps. who can table it for you.

It must be a question of fact, not a hypothetical question, on the subject of the Church of England nationally.



How does this session of Synod Business impact on the Diocese of Ely?

- We shall need to consider the Women Bishops legislation which will be remitted to dioceses for consideration.
- Every diocese has been asked to appoint someone to be a contact person for promoting church tourism.
- We shall need to discuss climate change and security at our Diocesan Synod
- We will be encouraged to deepen relationships with Methodist neighbours.

Climate Change & Human Security



Synod received a report on climate change and the effect which it is having on the world. The recommendations were endorsed and Diocesan Synods were asked to consider the report so as to develop an integrated and holistic response to climate change. The General Synod will consider progress on this issue by July 2010. This is a vital issue and we can all play our part in reducing climate change. Do look at the report on the Synod website if you'd like to know more.

General Synod

next meets from the 9th-13th February 2009 in London. If you would like a question asked do write.

Finance

The Synod considered the annual report of the Church Commissioners and welcomed the strong performance of their investments.

GAFCON

GAFCON stands for the 'Global Anglican Futures Conference' which recently took place in Jerusalem attended by 1148 Bishops, Clergy and Laity from around the world. In one of the lunchtime sessions, those from Synod who went shared their experiences and the Jerusalem Declaration was passed around. To find out more do look up the GAFCON website and the Archbishop of Canterbury's website for a response.

Please pray for:

- All who will take forward the next stage of the legislation for women bishops.
- Those within our Diocese who feel marginalised by Synod's decisions.
- Those women who may be called to be our first Women Bishops
- A wholehearted commitment to reducing carbon emissions which are so damaging to the climate of the developing world.
- All our Bishops at the Lambeth Conference

Choosing Bishops, etc.

There were a number of pieces of legislation enabling the Church to respond to the Prime Minister's decision no longer to have the final say in choosing Diocesan Bishops. Legislation dating from Henry VIII was amended so that only one name of a Suffragan Bishop should be presented to the Queen, rather than two as at present. There will be better representation from parishes on the Crown Nominations Committee for appointing Diocesan Bishops, with only one member of Senior staff allowed. Parish reps will have a veto if their parish is a crown appointment.



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Parochial Fees

The General Synod received a report on the payment of parochial fees. This considered the fees for weddings and funerals amongst other matters.

The Synod requested the Archbishop's Council to produce draft legislation to put into effect the recommendations of the report. For example, the priest's fees might be paid directly to the Diocesan Board of Finance. Incumbents will have some flexibility in the charging of fees. Synod will consider the draft legislation in due course.



If you want to know more about anything you've read here: check out the General Synod Website at www.cofe.anglican.org/news, beg, borrow or steal a copy of the church press or give one of us a ring. See above.



THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND