

General Synod Report

Outline of business done

The Synod met from **Monday 9th to Friday 13th 2004** at Church House, Westminster. The general perception beforehand was that this was an important meeting of the Synod with a number of significant reports.

Monday

- Report on the progress of Measures and Statutory Instruments (Included that the Clergy Discipline Measure came into force on 1 October 2003)
- Report by the Business Committee - a chance to complain about what is on or not on the agenda.
- Additional Collects - final approval was given to a new set of collects because many people felt that those authorised with Common Worship were staid and inappropriate for many settings. This is the second significant revision to Common Worship (the second being the Baptism service) showing that not everyone is happy with what has been produced.
- Question time - as lively as ever
- Community Relations (a Private Member's motion expressing concern about the policies and success of the British National Party).

Tuesday

- A range of legislation to do with reducing the size of the Synod. There will be a reduction in the number of Deans, Archdeacons will no longer have their own election (cutting over 40 Clergy places), the Laity numbers will be cut and a couple of Suffragan Bishops. This is expected to be in force by the time of the elections next year.
- Draft Miscellaneous Provisions Measure (a collection of minor changes to existing legislation).
- Mission-shaped Church. Bishop Graham Cray, not a member of the Synod, had been invited to speak to the Synod. The Bishop of Liverpool then stressed that this report was largely about recognizing creative ways of being church that have grown out of the grass roots of the Church. The report aims to set out an integrated strategy for both neighbourhood (parish churches etc) and network church as a response to the mobile and diverse environment of today. The report was well received and many of the suggestions within it are already shaping other business before the Synod this week. There were several amendments passed most of which were worthy but made the final motion cumbersome and complicated.
- There are some controversial issues including the proposals regarding church planting but also the extent to which we should adapt Christian teaching and practice to the world around and to what extent we are actually calling people to transform their lives in accordance with the gospel and the purposes of God in creating the Church. (see below)
- A Measure for Measure. Some of this relates directly to Mission-shaped Church. A new Mission and Ministry Measure is to be produced. Will, among other things, allow for the merger of Dioceses where appropriate. But also make the Church more dynamic in meeting the needs of the day.
- Draft Pastoral (Amendment) Measure.
- Gender Neutral Titles. In all new legislation gender neutral titles will be used - chair instead of chairman.

Wednesday

- Future use of Church Commissioners Funds. This was by far the most heated debated. In order to provide a pot of money to fund Mission initiatives the Commissioners proposed that the costs of Bishops and some Cathedral staff be transferred to Dioceses. This is an excellent idea because it increases accountability. However, the idea gained a mauling by the vested interests, not least several Bishops. In the end the debate was adjourned so that pressure could be brought on the Commissioners to modify their proposals.
- Being Human. Fourth report of the Doctrine Commission providing a useful resource on money, sex, power and time.
- Some Issues in Human Sexuality. This was expected to be a controversial debate but the debate was fairly subdued. The Synod did nothing except agree that the report would be a useful resource for discussion. The members of Synod most passionate about change all spoke and indeed provided the majority of speakers. Many appear to be growing increasingly weary of the issue and the damage it is doing to the witness of the Church and the unity of the Anglican Communion.
- Report of the Standing Orders Committee

- Diocesan Synod motion on 'cohabitation'. The initial motion was badly worded and was revised by the Synod. In the end the Synod recognised that there are issues of hardship and vulnerability for people whose relationship is not based on marriage (eg. two sisters sharing a family house). It is hard to see how the Government could adequately address this issue without creating greater problems.

Thursday

- Draft Stipends (Cessation of Special Payments) Measure. Guarantees were given to churches a generation ago that funds they handed over would be safeguarded for the promotion of parochial ministry. This measure revokes those guarantees!
- Common Worship Ordinal (first consideration). This is not a revolutionary revision. However, the services for Deacons, Priests and Bishops have been shaped to be much more different. This is good to a degree but there are concerns that the service actually accentuates the difference between Bishops and Priests and seems to introduce much more language indicative of a hierarchy. The services will be considered by revision committee and will go back the Synod at least twice.
- The Liturgical Commission had proposed to remove the requirement of Bishops to make the Declaration of Assent publicly in the service of Consecration. They therefore brought an amendment to the Canons to allow this, but the Synod threw it out.
- 'Telling the Story: Being Positive about HIV/AIDS'. Part the motion encouraged parishes to use World AIDS Day (Dec 1) to raise awareness of the impact of AIDS and also to raise funds to help.
- Weekday Lectionary and amendments to Calendar, Lectionary and Collects etc.
- Review of Clergy Terms of Service This process was in response to the government requirement that the Church provide adequate employment protection to all clergy. The initial phase of the work was to look at clergy without freehold. The tension was whether clergy would end up being employed and if so by whom. In the even the report advocates extending employment rights to all clergy whilst still making them office holders that involves the concept of 'common tenure'. This was generally well received as a creative response and will now go forward for legislation.

Friday

- Gift of Authority. The Gift of Authority is the fourth report of ARCIC II. It has proved very controversial in the Church of England not least because it fails to address some of the key areas of disagreement between Anglicans and Roman Catholics on the matter of Authority. The motion from the Council for Christian Unity reflected this discontent, which is unusual in the history of ARCIC, and asked that further work be done on the areas of dispute.
- Asylum. The motion passed applauded and encouraged the work done by churches and others in responding to the needs of refugees and asylum seekers. Concern was expressed by the way in which the media have handled some of the issues. The motion also called on the Government to respond more effectively to the needs of asylum seekers.

*David Phillips
10 March 2004*

*Regular reports from the Synod are posted on
EVNEWS (visit evangelicals.org)
and the Church Society website (www.churchsociety.org/issues/church/Iss_Church_SynodNews.htm/)
Regular updates are also posted during the day whilst the Synod is sitting.*