

General Synod July 2009 in York – Personal Reflections

The recent session of General Synod, though little reported, contained important matters for our churches.

Opening the Doors is a clear and practical guide for parishes and clergy to enable people with learning disabilities, and those on the autistic spectrum, to be fully included in the life and worship of their church. We heard many examples of the contributions learning-disabled people can make, such as being part of a prayer ministry team, a sidesperson or welcomer. I can lend you an excellent taster DVD for parishes.

Also concerned about being inclusive is ***Being Adult about Childhood***, a consideration of *The Good Childhood Inquiry*. The authors actually *listened* to the views of thousands of children and young people on relationships, themselves, and where they live. Archbishop Rowan said we both patronise and demonise children. Child pain is the result of adult failure eg the experience of domestic conflict is toxic for far too many young people. Children belong to all of us; we should *all* take responsibility for them. We should foster good parenting, especially the role of fathers; and we need more men to be primary school teachers.

The retiring Bishop for Urban Life and Faith, Stephen Lowe, reported on his work of the last three years. ***The Urban Church*** shows outstanding work being done by the Church of England: youth work, adapting church buildings for drop-in centres, and so on. Bishop Stephen made a plea for politicians to support and resource the work of the CofE in communities *as* the CofE, without having to be part of a 'faith' group.

Giving for Life: Encouraging Generosity in your Parish is a set of resources which links giving to our discipleship. This encouraging and enthusiastic approach seeks, by preaching and teaching, to create people who are habitually generous. The booklet, which will reach us this autumn, helps PCCs and congregations move from unplanned to planned giving, and then to proportionate giving, aiming for 5% of income to the church and 5% to other causes. In St Edmundsbury & Ipswich we give on average £6.60 per week, against the national £8.62 – a huge opportunity for us to improve. I was delighted to be called to speak in this debate, which ended with the motion carried overwhelmingly.

There was much else on money and finance, always under the shadow of the current crisis. Our colleague Tim Allen had chaired the Revision Committee working on ***Ecclesiastical Fees*** and *how* they should be paid – direct to the diocese rather than to the clergy. The situation over ***Clergy Pensions*** was set out, with possible lengthening of service and higher contributions for future clergy. We looked at ***The Archbishops' Council's Spending Priorities 2010-2015***; there will be some effective reduction in the clergy training budget, and cuts in other budgets; but concern that work with children and young people should not be cut.

Legislation on church business included ***Senior Church Appointments*** – a call for the number of bishops to be reduced. This was completely overturned and referred back, with some even saying there should be *more* bishops rather than fewer. ***Other legislation*** included clergy terms of service, church representation rules, legal fees, vacancies in sees, and the constitution of General Synod committees, when we rejected the proposal for more 'cabinet-style' organisation. In a debate on the ***Clergy Discipline Measure*** we heard stories from clergy accused of criminal offences who had felt a lack of support. There can be a conflict between pastoral and disciplinary functions for a bishop. We made a strong call for a review of the practicalities of the Measure, including the way congregations can be affected.

Other topics covered were:

Additional weekday lectionary – There was discussion on this more varied alternative to the 'continuous' reading. It includes several more days of commemoration, including Suffolk's own Thomas Clarkson on 30 July; he retired to live in Playford after his work for the abolition of the slave trade.

Life in Christ – We discussed this 1994 Anglican-Roman Catholic (ARCIC) report on moral issues in small groups. It concentrated on divorce and contraception, where there are significant differences in outlook.

Anglican Communion – Archbishop Rowan reported on a recent meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council in Jamaica, where there had been a strong sense of interdependence.

There was, of course, much that *didn't* happen. Media hype beforehand about numbers of bishops came to nothing. Although not debated, there was a strong awareness of the Women Bishops Revision Committee now meeting monthly. We shall discuss its recommendations at our next meeting (London, 8-12 February). That will be the final year for us, with elections due in the autumn of 2010. Perhaps *you* could stand?

You can read more, including reports/speeches, on: www.cofe.anglican.org/about/gensynod/agendas/july09

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