

**General Synod ~ York**  
**10 to 13 July 2009**

Unusually Synod only met for four days rather than the customary five days in a humid York. The Conference Hall does not have air conditioning, being built in the late 1960s, so there was the danger of dropping off especially as afternoons wore on.

After the introduction of ecumenical observers **Bishop Nathan Hovhanissian from the Armenian Orthodox Church** brought greetings from his church. Armenia is proud to be the first country to have adopted Christianity as its official religion.

Following the customary debate on the Agenda Synod got down to its first major debate, which extended over 2 days, **Giving for Life**. Whilst giving in parishes is holding its own despite the economic situation it was still below the 5% of income earlier reports had proposed. A shorter version for PCCs to consider has 4 major recommendations.

1) More preaching on money, 2) Link Giving to Mission & Ministry (so that congregations know where the money goes, 3) Encourage an annual review of Giving, 4) Thank Givers in writing. This diocese had a foretaste on 6 June 2009 when Dr John Preston, the National Stewardship & Resources Officer, addressed Diocesan Synod.

Saturday morning's main business was legislative matters but first The Bishop of Hulme gave a presentation on **Faithful Cities ~ Urban Life & Faith**. Over the past few years it has come to be realised that too much reliance had been put on commercial property providing the money to upgrade run down inner city & outer suburban estates. The church is there for the long haul living in & encouraging deprived communities.

The afternoon started with a presentation on **Clergy Pensions**. Post 1997 service pension contributions are payable by the dioceses, in effect from the Parish Share. In 1998 the contribution rate was 19.7% (from memory) of stipend. This has grown to just under 40% of stipend for 2009, primarily because of the economic downturn but also because of accelerating longevity of retired clergy and particularly their spouses. As an *interim* measure 2010's contribution will be 45% but many dioceses say this is unaffordable in the long run and the actuarial advice is that contributions would need to rise to 56.6% if the present level of benefits is to remain. A working party is taking an overview as to the way forward. Amongst the ideas being considered *if the present scheme continues* is to increase service from 40 to 43 years for a full pension payable at 68 instead of 65, and annual increases capped at increases in the Retail Price Index as distinct from tracking stipends. Other options *being considered* include opting clergy back into the State second pension S2P but this would involve clergy paying an increase of 1.5% in National Insurance (c £250pa), with the clergy pension being reduced pro rata. All very technical and clergy are being consulted as to their views.

The evening session discussed both the **Archbishops' Council's and the Church Commissioners' Annual Reports**. The Commissioners contribution to the work of the church for 2010 will be met and, at this stage, probably for 2011 to 2014 as

previously forecast. The Commissioners deliberately budget across the business cycle so that not all is allocated in good years to act as a cushion for poorer years.

Sunday afternoon started with a DVD presentation **Opening the Doors: Ministry for people with learning disabilities & people on the autistic spectrum**. This report gives examples of best practice for churches reminding us for example that people on the autistic spectrum may find "The Peace" particularly stressful or that confirmation candidates may benefit from instruction by way of pictures as distinct from text.

The **Review of Constitutions** came back to Synod in a lightly amended form to that originally considered in February 2009 & met with considerable opposition. The proposal was to replace a number of Boards, including Education with individuals supported by *Reference Groups*. Synod rejected the report & its proposals asking the Archbishops' Council to think again.

Bradford Diocese's Motion on **Episcopal & Senior Church Appointments** which asked the Archbishops' Council to formulate proposals for the reduction in the number of Episcopal & senior clergy posts was substantially modified to reflect the work being done by the new Dioceses Commission.

The evening's debate was a Consideration of the Good Childhood Inquiry **Being Adult about Childhood**. Children make up about 15% of the population, half that of 30 years or so ago. Surveys have shown that children in England are at the bottom of many European surveys as regards happiness and fulfilment noting the break up of marriage and regular testing in schools as examples contributing to unhappiness. Fathers, once politically incorrect to mention, are now thought to be important in a child's wellbeing. Whilst hardly rocket science technology this bears out the church's teaching on faithful lifelong monogamous marriage as being the ideal.

On Monday, after the Archbishop of Canterbury gave an update on the **Anglican Consultative Council ACC 14** recent meeting in Jamaica, Synod spent the morning on further detailed legislative business.

The afternoon started with London Diocesan Synod Motion on the working out of the **Clergy Discipline Measure**. Essentially there is disquiet between the role of the bishop as pastor to his clergy and the bishop's disciplinary role. Synod approved an amended motion, with the support of the proposer, welcoming the decision of the Clergy Discipline Commission to consult on this and other possible problem areas.

Synod finished with the customary farewells when we said goodbye to the Bishops of Chelmsford & Ely & the Dean of the Arches, Sheila Cameron, who had practised as a barrister for 52 years.

Besides the set piece debates and presentations so much of Synod members time is taken up in fringe meetings across all aspects of the church's involvement with Society. Christian Broadcasting, Rural Affairs, Buildings, the Family, Tourism, Ethical Investment etc etc. Each morning starts with a Eucharist and the highlight at York is Sunday morning in the Minster with a beautiful setting of Widor's Mass for two organs & two choirs interspersed with African drumming.