

## GENERAL SYNOD JULY 2009

### Report for the Woodbridge and Loes Deanery Synods from Tim Allen

The July Synod in York focused principally on **the Church's financial problems**. There was no discussion on **Women Bishops** since this issue is now being examined in Revision Committee and will re-emerge before Synod in February 2010. Little time was spent on **outward-looking social issues**. The length of the Synod was reduced from five to four days – saving £22,000, on a total cost of £247,000.

This report concentrates selectively on what is of most relevance to our parishes. For a comprehensive account of everything, see the *Church Times* and the C of E's website – where you can find all the papers and, soon, a verbatim report of all the debates.

As always, the debates were surrounded by **worship and prayer**. In addition to daily early morning Eucharists and morning and evening prayers in the debating chamber, on the Sunday morning there was a splendid sung Eucharist at York Minster – with the Archbishop of Canterbury celebrating and the Archbishop of York preaching. At this, it was exciting to see our **new Archdeacon Judy Hunt** processing just in front of the Archbishops in one of her present roles as Deputy Prolocutor of the Province of York (an office of considerable honour which shows she must be highly regarded by the clergy of the northern province). Her membership of the Synod enabled your representatives to talk to Archdeacon Judy at length – and convinced me that she will be a most valuable addition to the Diocese and to our Archdeanery in particular.

Of great importance to our Diocese, given our strained finances, was the Synod's endorsement of proposals from the Archbishops' Council to **cut back on central spending and thus limit the contribution ('Apportionment') required from dioceses**. Assuming inflation of 2%, the plan is that apportionment should rise by 1.5% (ie a real terms cut of 0.5%) in 2011 and 2012, and then rise by 2% per year (ie no growth in real terms) up to 2015. In the debate, I welcomed the decision, saying that I hoped this relief would 'give time for Bishop Nigel's much-needed reforms to turn the diocese around from continuing decline to growth'. The exact form of the cuts at the centre and the extent of any redundancies remain to be decided.

Equally important for us all – clergy and lay – was a presentation on the dire state of the **Clergy Pension Scheme** and on the proposals to remedy it by further changes to the Scheme which are now out for consultation. The deficit is now £350 million and the dioceses' contribution in 2010 will be 45% of stipend and could rise to 57% of stipend from 2011 unless changes are made. (NB none of the possible changes would affect pensions in payment or pension rights already earned by those still in service.) Although responses to the consultation are due by end-October, I hope it might be possible to stretch this deadline slightly so as to allow our Deanery and Diocesan Synods to express a view on this important matter.

Still on money, the Synod firmly endorsed (with a speech from Margaret Condict) the excellent guide ***Giving for Life: Encouraging Generosity in Your Parish*** prepared by John Preston, the National Stewardship Officer – who so impressed everyone when he spoke to our Diocesan Synod on 6 June. The booklet will be a most useful tool to

encourage giving in our parishes. I hope it, too, might be discussed by Deanery Synods this autumn.

Less encouraging, however, was the General Synod' refusal (by a large majority) to accept **proposals for constitutional reform** backed by both Archbishops to replace most of the present 'complex, cumbersome, costly and confused' system of central Boards, Councils and Committees by a streamlined structure of individual 'lead persons', supported by small 'reference groups' and monitored by 'review groups' which would meet once per year. Rev'd Max Osborne, from Newmarket (in a maiden speech), and I both spoke up, with some reservations, for the Archbishops' proposals; but most other speakers preferred less radical reform of the long-established status quo of large, broadly-based Committees etc.

There was much more support for an (amended) motion from the Diocese of Bradford to address **the number of bishops** – for financial and other reasons. The new, stronger Dioceses Commission is in the lead here – and our own diocese is strongly represented on this key body since both Bishop Nigel and Rev'd Jonathan Alderton-Ford (from Bury) are members. It is possible that within a few years the number of dioceses may be somewhat reduced (almost certainly our diocese, with its solid county boundary and of the right size, is entirely safe) and that some Suffragan Bishops will not be replaced when they retire. (I was encouraged that the amended motion dropped the original suggestion from Bradford that Archdeacons, too, should be reduced in number.)

In the area of **legislation**, matters of finance were also to the fore. The **Fees Measure** (on which I had chaired the Revision Committee and thus had to speak at some length) got a largely fair wind. Important details, including whether or not the standard, national fees for, eg weddings and funerals should include or exclude heating and other costs remain to be decided. Cathedrals will keep their fees, rather than being required to hand them over to the DBF.

Leaving money at last, there were outward-looking debates on **urban life and faith, ministry with people with learning disabilities** and on the '**Good Childhood Inquiry**'.

There was another high-quality debate on problems concerning the **Clergy Discipline Measure** – essentially the difficulties which arise from the Diocesan Bishop being both pastor and disciplinarian in relation to clergy against whom a complaint has been made. There were two particularly brave and harrowing speeches from clergy who had been subject to disciplinary procedures. A review is being held.

The Archbishop of Canterbury reported on recent **developments in the Anglican Communion** - chiefly the recent successful meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council in Jamaica which, encouragingly, was boycotted by no Province. But this was overshadowed by news that the US Episcopal Church was again moving towards appointing gay Bishops. Further trouble seems to lie ahead – probably involving Bishop Nazir Ali, who declined to attend the Lambeth Conference and is about to resign as Bishop of Rochester. He will look after persecuted Anglican minorities abroad, but no doubt his dissenting voice will continue to be raised in England.

Other **Bishops about to retire** include those of our neighbouring dioceses of Chelmsford and Ely.

Finally, on an altogether more agreeable note, there was a proposal before Synod to celebrate the famous Suffolk anti-slavery campaigner **Thomas Clarkson**. This is such a good news story for us – especially for Playford and the rest of the Woodbridge Deanery – that I finish this report with a slightly edited version of what I said to Synod:

‘I want to thank the Liturgical Commission for adding to the list of those commemorated in the Lesser Festivals the name of Thomas Clarkson – the prominent anti-slavery campaigner. Clarkson was a Suffolk man, having lived for the last 30 years of his life in the small Suffolk village of Playford. He is buried at Playford and commemorated there by a modest memorial inside the church and by an obelisk in the churchyard.

Accident of the alphabet puts Clarkson before Wilberforce in the names to be celebrated on 30 July.

This is, however, the right order in a more significant sense.

For, just as Alban is celebrated as England’s proto-martyr, so Clarkson can justly be termed England’s ‘proto-abolitionist’. It was Clarkson who was instrumental in recruiting Wilberforce to the anti-slavery campaign.

This came about in the following, remarkable way.

After graduating in 1783, Clarkson stayed on in Cambridge to prepare for ordination. He was decidedly ambitious. Having won the University Latin Essay Prize in 1784 Clarkson resolved to aim at it again the following year. The essay topic for 1785 was *Anne liceat invito in servitutem* – Is it lawful to enslave the unconsenting?

Clarkson began writing his Latin essay, as he subsequently explained, as ‘an innocent contest for literary honour’. But, in writing in Latin about the horrors of slavery, he convinced himself of the need for reform.

Riding from Cambridge to London in June 1785, having read the prize-winning essay in the Senate House, he underwent a moment of conversion on the road. As Clarkson subsequently recorded, ‘a thought came into my mind that if the contents of the Essay were true, it was time that some person should see these calamities to an end’.

And Clarkson, with Wilberforce, eventually did just that. The essay, translated into English, was the first of his many influential anti-slavery pamphlets and books. It persuaded Wilberforce to promote the anti-slavery cause in Parliament, leading to the Act of 1807 abolishing the Slave Trade.

So Clarkson deserves his elevation – not quite to be a saint, it is true, but as near as we can get in Anglican England. I would like to think of him alongside and only a little lower than the longer-established Suffolk Saints – Felix, Fursey, Botolph and Edmund King and Martyr.

When the elevation of Thomas Clarkson is promulgated, there will certainly be great celebration at Playford and I hope in Suffolk more widely.’

**Tim Allen**

*17 July 2009*