

General Synod July 2018 – Report for Hereford Diocesan Synod

This was, at five days, a long session with heavy paperwork. I hope you will note that Hereford members continued to play a full part – maintaining a reputation as the little diocese that punches above its weight! I noted two changes at this session – the arrival of the (female) Bishops of London and Bristol means that the front rows are finally starting to look less like a boys' club, and the introduction of air conditioning in the hall, whatever environmental questions that may raise, made for greater comfort and, many thought, less hot-tempered debate. (*NB references below to votes show For-Against-Abstained*)

Friday 6th July

We began with addresses from Anglican Communion & Ecumenical Guests – the address from the primate of Pakistan being most striking. Then the **Business Committee** debate aired views on the Agenda. Hereford will want to know that **our Diocesan Synod Motion** was not tabled (not surprisingly, given that several other dioceses had motions already in the queue) but also that the Business Committee has determined to take no motions on sexuality until the report *Living in Love and Faith* (see Saturday) is complete in 2020. There were speeches and some votes expressing frustration at procrastination, but the overall mood seems to be that we need to engage with this new process. Our DSM remains 'parked' on the Agenda until the BC deems fit. We also agreed with the proposal to adjust the timings on Saturday afternoon so that people could more easily watch the football, which was put up on the big screens.

Synod then managed to fit in some quick legislation (including final drafting of the new **Ecumenical Measure and Canon**, making cooperation easier, and first consideration of a new Canon on the **Religious Life**) before the usual **Questions** session covering all manner of topics.

Saturday 7th July

The Archbishop of York gave an opening address, remaining even more coy than +Richard about his retirement date (although in his Sunday sermon he did pointedly refer to his date of birth in June 1949!) before we moved on to the important **Safeguarding** debate. The opening presentation was given by a survivor of abuse and an academic who is researching the subject, who were heard with great respect. Given the sensitivity of the subject and our obvious and recent failings in this area, it was quite a calm and measured debate, and there was full support (368-0-2) for the further actions proposed to increase rigour and consistency.

Saturday afternoon was taken up by **open seminars** on different aspects of **Living in Love & Faith** and drop-in workshops on evangelism, digital and young people. The former is the new name for the "teaching document" to be produced by the House of Bishops. There is a large Steering Group including representatives of different viewpoints, and then groups of specialists on Theology, Bible, History and Science (each of which held a seminar) and a Pastoral Group offering advice on working with the present situation. There was a lot of good dialogue; it is basically too early to say what, or even in what exact form, the final document will be. Some people watched a football match instead of the middle session. On Saturday night a meeting of the House of Clergy asked the Archbishops' Council for a **review of stipends** and heard a report (from Simon Cawdell & others) on ongoing work on Clergy Wellbeing.

Sunday 8th July

After our traditional attendance at the Minster and the equally traditional Hereford refreshment at Betty's Tea Rooms, the afternoon was given to three big debates on matters of global significance. The first was on **climate change**, and specifically what policy should be adopted in **church investments**. This was a very good debate, between those (led by an amendment from the Diocese of Oxford) calling for rapid disinvestment in fossil fuels (by 2020) and those (including some seasoned environmental campaigners) pointing to the value of the Transition Pathway Initiative, whereby the Church has become a leader among many other investors in using shareholder influence. Perhaps predictably, Synod found the Oxford amendment a bit too radical, but accepted a compromise amendment from another long-term campaigner, Giles Goddard, setting 2023 as the target for "change or disinvest", and passed the main motion 347-4-3.

This was followed by a related debate, calling for various actions within the Church to reduce **our carbon footprint**. This did not proceed quite so well, as it became apparent that the organisational and financial requirements of a call from General Synod for action at diocesan and local level had not really been worked out, and so we agreed to **adjourn** this debate until some more homework could be done.

Finally we returned to an old topic of debate, **nuclear weapons**, and considered a moderate disarmament motion from +Chelmsford (including endorsement of the 2017 UN Prohibition Treaty, which the UK and other nuclear powers have pointedly resisted). Speeches ranged across different areas, including clear respect for those staffing our deterrent, and an amendment moving the motion in a more unilateralist direction was defeated, before the main motion was endorsed 260-26-21.

Monday 9th July

After the annual report of the Archbishops' Council we received and approved the **Budget**, presented by John Spence with his usual charisma, albeit with the alert that planned giving has stopped rising across the Church. The budget (covering much, but not all, of central costs including clergy training) is rising by 9%, largely due to more ordinands and additional costs of safeguarding. The increase in diocesan contributions has been held down to 3.3% by bringing in reserves and helpful rental income from Church House. Canon Spence explained that this was a bit of a stop-gap, and that he intended to bring us a long-term plan next year.

The late morning and most of the afternoon were a **legislative marathon**, including a good deal of useful legal consolidation around pensions and property. Particularly time-consuming was the final revision of the **Church Representation & Ministers Measure**, covering PCC and Synod elections, procedure, etc. This will introduce a number of useful changes helpful to small parishes, and I suggest that when it does become law (next year) we could produce a guide for the diocese. These include the dropping of the requirement to hold 4 PCC meetings a year in favour of "a sufficient number to enable efficient transaction of business". An amendment to reverse this did not find support. Also, the draft required a minimum of five persons on a PCC standing committee – one of the few successful amendments was from our Simon, reducing this to three where the electoral roll is less than 50 – the crucial vote was 114-89-20.

The overrunning legislation meant that we only had time left for was a debate on the **NHS** (other items were postponed). This came from Carlisle Diocese, concerned as we might be for rural healthcare, morphed into endorsement of a House of Lords call for a national review of long-term sustainability. To this we added clauses praising NHS staff and calling for Christians to be caring to neighbours, and not surprisingly this all **passed nem con**. Lest you think that Synod has no effect, some noted not only that Synod motions on gambling and conversion therapy have now been followed by government action, this vote was followed by the almost instant movement of Jeremy Hunt from the Department of Health!

Tuesday 10th July

After a report from the Church Commissioners and some reappointments, we debated the **Cathedrals** report, which arises from the recent crises at Exeter and Peterborough and proposes various governance and regulatory changes. There is broad agreement about the financial and administrative aspects (including better central support) but proposals to add more lay canons to Chapter as 'non-execs', make residentiary canons accountable to deans, and add a Vice-Chair appointed by the bishop have all been controversial. I responded to this sense of disquiet by proposing that the motion to bring the necessary legislation in February be postponed to July, and this passed easily. This is obviously going to rumble on at a variety of levels.

Finally we revised our own **Standing Orders**, both to require amendments in non-legislative business to require 25 members' support for debate (hopefully reducing vexatious and/or self-promotional amendments) and also laid to rest the charming, but increasingly theatrical, custom that every debate continues until someone (usually Mr Freeman of Chester) stands up to propose the 'motion for closure' after a hint from the Chair – instead the Chair will just propose it, although Synod will still need to agree. We ended as usual with **farewells**, to Sion Hughes-Carew on the staff, who is giving up Synod note-taking and electronic vote-running to train for ordination, and the retiring Bishop of Derby.