

**GENERAL SYNOD – JULY 2006** (A personal view by Sarah Chapman & Adrian Harbidge)

I note that my last summary of Synod (February) commented on how little Legislation needed to be discussed; in July (so far as agenda items are concerned), legislation appeared to dominate. Several members said that however tiring it was to stay in the chamber, they did because they felt they had been elected and the cost of their presence was high. Of course, for most of the press there was only one item of business - the debates about Women in the Episcopate.

**Friday**

The usual welcomes and introductions including the new Prolocutors. Kay Garlick as the new chairperson of the Business committee had a relatively easy ride on the **Agenda** debate. Because of the Bishop of Portsmouth's illness (and some real and genuine sorrow about that), the Bishop of Dover presented the **Board of Education** report. There was encouragement for the report although Prof. Thistleton said it lacked 'cognitive rigour' but was a very positive response to the Government's thinking on this matter – so we as the Church grab it by both hands.

The evening agenda was shortened by a **Presidential Address** about the Anglican Communion and **Questions** were somewhat sombre until we began to run out of time and the pub named the Mad Bishop and how it was named was advanced up the questions so that the Bishop of Willesden could reply although it was pointed out that it was out of his area.

**Saturday**

There seems little of humour in this new synod, certainly amongst the characters who speak the most; Bishop Colin Buchanan is sorely missed, though the Archbishop of York lightens the mood again and again.

The first bite of the **Women Bishops (the Theology)** was passed although, as expected, required a division by houses and while achieving a 2/3 majority in the houses of Bishops and Clergy, would not have done so in the house of Laity. No one could however argue that it was not a theological debate with several bishops engaging, including heavyweights such as the Bishop of Durham.

The rest of the day was legislative business - **Church Accounting Regulations, Draft Dioceses, Pastoral and Mission Measure** (providing for a lighter touch when working with changes to parish and diocesan boundaries), **Amendment to the Diocese of Europe Constitution, the C of E Legal Aid Rules 2006, the Legislative Officers/Parochial fees** (slightly amended so that wedding fees were not too high), the **Care of Cathedral Rules** and the **C of E Funded Pensions Scheme (Amendment) Rules 2006**, were passed - I would rather watch paint dry! However, it did include the **draft Clergy Discipline Order for the Bailiwick of Guernsey** (an absolute highlight for most of those in the Winchester Diocese!)

The **Marriage Measure** invited lots of speakers and was overwhelmingly carried on the back of 'Mission-Shaped church', allowing for greater flexibility on where couples can have their church weddings.

## **Sunday**

York Minster is always a highlight and watching the Archbishop of York in a beautiful cope (I am sure a Juliet Hemmingray design) playing drums in the last but one hymn made me feel OK about being a member of the Church of England.

In the afternoon, a Presentation about **Pensions** – they are going to cost us a lot, but maybe not as much as we feared – leading into more financial business. Southwark Diocese then led a debate on **Carbon Dioxide Emissions**, encouraging church members to reduce emissions by 60% by 2050. [It occurs to me that, if Winchester Diocese were to put forward a motion for discussion at General Synod, what subject would we choose?]

The day ended with a report on the **Ninth Assembly of the World Council of Churches** (and Italy defeating France on penalties).

## **Monday**

The morning was given over to starting the **legislative process for ordaining Women to the Episcopate** – not an easy task, but made much more hazardous by various amendments: we both endorsed the point that those who oppose Women Priests and Bishops are still loyal members of the Church of England, but then insisted on reminding everyone that, under Canon A4, there can be no such thing as a second class deacon, priest or bishop – all must be acknowledged as properly ordained by all their fellow clergy. I fear that what felt like an untidy debate will need to be repeated within the next two years.

The afternoon was given over to exploring (partly in groups) the Report Faithful Cities – what makes a good city? What can we do twenty years on after *Faith in the City*? Certainly it was felt that this was well worth discussing in our parishes and deaneries, and that much of its content applies equally to rural areas.

A very clear presentation from Professor David MacLean rounded the day off, giving us an update on new ideas for **Clergy Terms of Service** and the need for Common Tenure; it was fascinating to hear him describe the varieties of Freehold that exist in the church at the moment – depending on the living, some clergy have freehold of their parsonage, some do not (and it makes little difference on the ground). Firm proposals are emerging that will allow more clergy to be incumbents, benefices will be retained, clergy are likely to be given Section 23 rights, but Common Tenure (starting with Bishops and Archdeacons) will provide for flexibility.

## **Tuesday**

With all the Legislative business disposed of, there was actually time to hear an emergency question about the **ending of particular Christian programmes in prisons**; the Bishop of Worcester's response was that the Church of England Newspaper had got their facts completely wrong.

A Private Member's Motion from Mrs Joanna Monckton of Lichfield called on the Government to reinstate the **Married Couple's Tax Allowance**. This was a real debate, with clear arguments put on both sides (Dr Peter May and Bishop Michael were both able to make telling points) – married men live longer, the family is the primary care unit, with Tax Credits a couple have to work 74 hours a week to get above the poverty line but this is achieved by a lone parent with Tax Credits after only 16 hours work a week. Let's celebrate marriage and criticise the tax regime, but don't mix the two. With amendments we both celebrated marriage and criticised taxes and the motion was carried *nem con*.

**And so to the motorway**

One or two *bon mots* – a younger member talking about women bishops: “I hear there used to be a woman prime minister, but that was before my time;” “These days, people test me to see if I am in communion with them, not the other way round” (the Bishop of Lincoln); “Are we reinventing the wheel, or is it a flat tyre?”