

Dear Reader

After a good journey to York we arrived to find nothing seemed to have changed at the University, with the exception that there were a few extra ducks around the place. Friday afternoon's session started in the usual way with introductions of ecumenical visitors followed by the Business Committee report. This tried to give the impression we had a lot to do, but Synod felt the agenda was weak in content especially when compared with the past two years when we have been discussing Women in the Episcopate.

Friday evening saw Question Time which consisted of 96 questions; some of the interesting ones included, "Are ordinands routinely asked whether they are prepared to serve under a Women Bishop?" The answer was a clear "no" the question is not asked.

Another question was, "How many priests have voluntarily transferred to Common Tenure?" We were told that 33 Dioceses had replied formerly so far. This leaves 10 Dioceses which had not replied. Of those who had replied 34 Bishops (34 % of those in post), plus 2 Archbishops (100%), 21 Archdeacons (nearly 21 %), 2 Deans (5%), and 290 freehold incumbents (7%) had transferred to Common Tenure.

To the question asking the Government whether they were able to change the law, to enable Christians to work and express their Christian views at work without the threat of losing their jobs. The answer was, the law does not prevent due respect and that some employers had interpreted the law to enable this to happen more readily.

The question was asked about the relative and absolute costs of General Synod held at Church House, London and York to (a) central funding bodies, and (b) dioceses in aggregate. The reply to the question was, Church House London: central funding- £75,000, dioceses - £150,000. York General Synod central funding - £116,000 and dioceses - £220,000. A total cost to the Church for all General Synod meetings of £561,000.

Saturday morning started with the Archbishop of Canterbury's Presidential Address, where he set the scene for that morning's group activities on "Sharing Good News for the world today". The Archbishop explained how on his recent visit to the Eastern Congo he discovered all over again why the Church mattered. One after another, people in the Eastern Congo kept saying to him, "The Church didn't abandon us," when they had to flee to the forests.

We then broke into groups of 12, chaired by a Bishop, and went through a thought provoking booklet entitled "Sharing Good News for the world today". This gave us the opportunity to talk with each other about what it felt like to be Christian, and to exchange our perceptions of what it is that would be lost for ever if the church were not here.

The aim of the group activity was to listen more carefully to one another. The first task was Gift Giving, where we had to imagine we were going to be given a small gift as a thank you for being a Synod member. We might choose something to remind us of the gifts we had brought to the Synod, e.g. a pen, candle, stone, or piece of bread. We each said what we would like. Next came Listening, thinking about what the Archbishop said and what word or words were most significant for the Church today. We then chose an image or item from our own church which would illustrate the words we chose. In the last section we were given some quotations from young people outside the Church on what they thought about the church. Finally, in response to what the young people said we discussed how we could share Good News with these young people more effectively. We all felt it was a most useful way to spend the morning. A summary is to be made available later on.

Saturday afternoon saw the Parochial Fees Order 2011 debate, where the next 3 years fees were to be set out in line with the requirements of the new Measure passed in February 2011. The main aim was to set a uniform charge for all parishes, with no extra fees allowed for heating, vergers, and admin. Music and order of services would incur an optional fee because people had a real choice as to whether they required these for their service. The fees for funerals were to come down to £ 150 and wedding fees were to go up to £405 per service. There was a lot of debate from the rural churches who were not at all happy as they rely on the extra payments to help defray their costs. After a long debate there was a vote on the motion,

which was overwhelmingly lost. The Parochial Fees Order 2011 now goes back for further consideration. In the mean time the 2010 Fees Order remains in place until further notice.

Following discussion on the good work of the Church Conservation Trust, Synod agreed payments being made to the Church Conservation Trust of £4,065,000 per year for 3 years.

A Private Member's Motion on Mission Action Planning in the Church of England was a lively debate. It was argued that there was a need for a National Mission Action Plan. In support of this it was noted how parishes with a Mission Action Plan can grow if they take this step in faith, and have some fun at the same time as objectives being worked out. It was stressed that everyone needed to be involved in the process. Out of the 343 Synod members who voted on the motion for a National Mission Action Plan, only 20 of the number were against or abstained.

After Sunday lunch we debated the Higher Education Funding Changes: a report which was from the Ministry Division. It was reported we were at the beginning of the process of discerning what God wants and we were not to be afraid to wrestle with the issues; we needed to think of the wider picture and not restrict ourselves to small present funding concerns. One idea presented was taking on young people to fulfil set roles within the church, which they would be paid for and receive training. In 8 -10 years time there would be a process of discernment to see if they felt called to ordination, having already experienced and been involved in a particular form of ministry in the church.

The Bradford Diocesan Synod Motion on the Admission of Baptised Adults to Communion wanted the House of Bishops to bring forward regulations to authorise the admission to Holy Communion of adults who have been baptised but not yet confirmed. This resulted in a Procedural Motion being requested. It was felt the process which could enable this to happen needed to be looked at so that the needs of adults were not confused with the needs of young people in a similar situation. The procedural motion was carried and no changes will happen without further work on the implications of the proposed changes being brought before Synod.

At Sunday Evensong, Bishop Victoria of Christchurch, New Zealand, gave a reflection on life after the earthquake and how the whole community had changed for the better. She gave an example of how 2000 students from the university came out and helped dig out residents. She also shared how the Bishop's house was so badly damaged that she could not return to live in it, as it was too dangerous. The Diocesan Surveyor invited her to stay the night in his home. Bishop Victoria explained how the people have changed for the better, even though it will take many years to get everything back to normal. The reflection ended by Bishop Victoria saying, "what will the new normal be?" She asked us all for our continual prayers over the coming months and years. I felt it was a very moving reflection on the terrible devastation they had suffered and how they had been given the strength to go forward positively.

Additional Eucharistic Prayers were next on the agenda. It was explained that the prayers were aimed at primary school age children and were intended to lead them into regular Sunday worship. The importance that they needed to be in the language of a child was stressed throughout the debate. We were also told Messy Church had celebrated its first confirmation and that there was a great need for a Messy Eucharist for the young people who are nurtured by Messy Church.

The last session before lunch on Monday was a London Diocesan Motion on the House of Laity elections, "That this Synod request the Business Committee to commission a thorough review of how the House of Laity of this Synod and the Houses of Laity of Diocesan Synods are elected, with particular consideration being given to (a) whether the electorate should be somebody of persons other than the lay members of deanery synods and (b) ensuring that the diverse membership of the Church of England is fully reflected and represented". After a lot of discussion and a procedural motion that failed, the original motion was carried by 197 for, 93 against and 24 abstentions. It emerged during the debate that the Business Committee had already set up an election review group, and that if carried, this motion would add more clout to the process.

If you would like any further information or have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me on 01432 340050 or email rk.lording@virgin.net
Rosemary Lording

