

General Synod February 2014

“Peaceful,” he said.

“PEACEFUL?” I expostulated, “General Synod?”

“Yes,” came the reply, “the age of miracles is not passed.”

After all the disappointment, hard feelings and heart-searching of the previous debate on women bishops, peace seems to have broken out. In the fifteen months since the Synod parted in disarray and disagreement huge strides have been made by the various parties to listen and talk to each other. Somewhere in the mix has been Archbishop Justin’s enthusiasm for reconciliation but the new proposals which were debated in February command the support of the vast majority of Synod members. The proposals, which in simple terms rely more on relationships and trust rather than law, have now been sent to the dioceses for their consideration and the hope is that the July meeting of the Synod in York will finish the job. Fingers crossed and knees firmly in contact with the floor!

So what else did the Synod get up to in this atmosphere of sweetness and light? Some really serious subjects exercised the minds of members including

- Ethical investment - how should the Church invest its money in ways which do not support industries like tobacco and armaments but which might encourage good management and practices?
- Gender-based violence – what can churches do to stand against all the forms of violence by men against women, personal and institutional?
- Safeguarding – how can the Church, nationally and locally, improve its processes so that the vulnerable among us, both children and adults, can be sure that churches are safe places?

And then right at the end, deliberately timetabled so that it could only be received, not debated yet, came the first sight of the Pilling Report on human sexuality. Some say that the forthcoming arguments about homosexuality will make the women bishops issue look like a vicarage tea party. We’ll see!