

GENERAL SYNOD

Reflections on the February 2012 Group of Sessions

My mother used to tell me that “the wheels of God grind slowly but they grind exceedingly small”. I’ve never been quite sure what that means but if the wheels of God grind slowly that gives the General Synod the excuse to grind even slower! It’s 10 years since the first moves were made to allow women to become bishops in the C of E and we’re still not (quite) there yet. The recent GS meeting in London moved things forward just a little but we’ll have to wait until July for a final decision.

So, what’s holding things up? 42 of the 44 dioceses in the C of E have voted in favour of women bishops with 75% of those voting being in favour. The will of the church, after much prayer and debate, is clearly seen. But ... a significant minority of clergy and laity believe that, in all conscience, the bible and church tradition forbid women becoming bishops. So the C of E is seeking to make provision for them – that is, going ahead with women bishops but making arrangements so that those who cannot agree can still stay in the Church as honoured members. And, as things stand, we can’t agree what that provision should be.

So in the four days during which the Synod met there were three debates about various aspects of the legislation needed to allow women bishops. The longest was 3¼ hours in a warm, packed chamber, everyone listening intently to what was said (as well as what was meant and what was not said – equally important) and no loo breaks! The two Archbishops having slightly different views on the way forward; ordinary Synod members speaking passionately but carefully; the chairman holding things together like a good referee – and we inch forward. We’ve left it to the bishops to do some more thinking, praying and talking before July. Everyone says the final vote in July will be very close.

But to those of you who prayed for the Synod this week, thank you. I’ve no proof, of course, but I thought your prayers worked and the Spirit was abroad in those debates. There was passion but no anger; there was challenge but no abuse (unlike 20 years ago over women priests); there was a clear will to get this right and move on. So keep us in your prayers, please.

And what else did we get up to? As the newspapers proclaimed, we decided to put wedding fees up, but only as part of a package which links the fees for weddings and funerals to actual costs – for the first time! We had an illuminating debate on assisted dying and came out strongly against. We heard about the Anglican Alliance, a small group which helps Anglican churches in different countries support each other in practical ways. And we sent the Queen a Loyal Address on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of her accession.

And the highlights? One was a sermonette from Archbishop Rowan on the mystery of Holy Communion “we waste time talking about it – all we can do is enter it”. And the other was morning worship led by the deaf members of Synod. They signed the service and we were the disabled, needing a translator to put their words into our language. In a place so full of spoken words that was quiet, powerful stuff.

(David Kemp - email: kemps11@btinternet.com – tel: 01227 272470)