

Report on
GENERAL SYNOD – February 2015

If General Synod members thought “That’s the women bishops stuff sorted – now for a snooze”, they were rudely awakened at Westminster this month. The Synod was talking about GROWTH. Yes, that’s right, the Church of England turning round decades of genteel decline and beginning to grow in numbers and in depth.

Discussion and debate in small groups, in bigger groups, and on the floor of the Synod chamber all added to the sense that members were being given every encouragement to take Growth seriously.

First, talk of discipleship, lifelong learning to follow Jesus more closely. How can every member of the church be encouraged to go on deepening their faith and witness, so that (almost as a side effect) the church can grow?

Then, significant changes in the way the money provided to dioceses by the Church Commissioners is allocated. At the moment it’s done through a complicated and opaque formula. In future half will be targeted at the poorest areas of the country, with the other half funding specific projects which aim to grow the church.

And finally, a real push to ordain more men and women so that there are more leaders committed to growth.

Huge questions remain ... How will we pay for the new clergy if the church doesn’t grow? Is decline inevitable given the social context of the 21st Century? How do we ease the burden of historic buildings? But ... at least the Church is not sitting on its hands and waiting politely for extinction. Watch this space!

So what else happened at the Synod?

It heard from the Chaldean Archbishop of Erbil in Iraq about the difficult and dangerous times faced by Christians in that country. If Christians in England think they have problems, think again!

One morning was taken up with three “S”s – safeguarding, standing orders and suicide. Yes, a heavy session.

The Church was agreeing detailed procedures which will be enshrined in law and will improve our efforts to safeguard those in our church communities who are vulnerable.

Standing Orders help the Synod to run smoothly and, while not exactly setting the blood racing, remind us that St Paul believed that administration is one of the gifts of the Spirit.

And the Church finally agreed formally that those who have taken their own life can be accorded a Christian burial. Up to now it has been against church law but thankfully most priests have turned a Nelsonian eye to the law and ministered sensitively to the grieving relatives. Now they can do it legally.

Finally the Synod received and debated an excellent report on the Church in rural areas – huge amounts of excellent work going on but it must be supported better by the Church as a whole.

One more meeting for this Synod in July then elections! 2015 must be the year for elections.

David Kemp