

Summary from General Synod, July 2017.

Andrew Bell

Due to meeting timings, and with the summer break intervening, it now seems a long time since General Synod met in early July. This time I offer a very brief summary of some of the proceedings (all of the papers are available on the Church of England website, General Synod page), and then a few personal reflections. I'm always happy to discuss in more detail.

- A motion introduced by the Archbishops following the General Election result called us to pray, to lobby and to maintain strong and generous international relationships.
- The seemingly obligatory controversial motions were of course the ones that made the news. Synod voted against "gay conversion therapy", and asked the Bishops to consider whether there should be liturgy to welcome transgender people. A new teaching document on sexuality is promised for 2020, and a Pastoral Advisory Group is being established.
- There was the usual batch of legislative business, including final approval of amending canons regarding robes and funeral services for those who have taken their own lives.
- We participated in workshops on "National support for local churches" – initiatives including "Thy Kingdom Come" prayer, Youth and Children's work, and the soon-to-be-revamped website. (See Col 4:2-6 – pray first!).
- We asked the government and admissions authorities to facilitate school admission of children of clergy and other workers required to live in tied accommodation, when they move into a new area.
- We voted unanimously for investigation of the issues around the very high cost of applying for citizenship, and hardship that can cause.
- We commended the "Presence and Engagement Programme" supporting the Church's mission in multi-faith communities and contexts.

I have to say that I came away saddened, not so much about the decisions taken – of course we are against abusive therapies, and of course we want to welcome everyone in Jesus' name – but about the tone of the debates and the way that decisions were made. Debates were won or lost based on anecdotes, with theological reflection and scripture relegated to the background. Attempts to emphasise the uniqueness of Christ were defeated. The direction of travel in synod seems to be that the church should follow the way of our culture. Surely though, as the people of God we need to stand together under the grace of God alone. We must "*not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*" (Rom 12:2).

Good things happened too! "Renewal and Reform" aims to revitalise the Church, help it to grow, and to make Christ central in our nation. It underlies much of what we are aiming to do, for example the initiatives under bullet points 4 and 7 above; and it motivates our budget-setting. As a church, let us "*Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you will be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand!*" (Eph 3:13).