

# DIOCESAN SYNOD DIGEST



## Cologne May 2010

Welcome to this new on-line publication offering a reflection on the Diocesan Synod which met in Cologne at the end of May 2010. It is not intended to replace or rival formal minutes of the 4 day event but to give a glimpse of the scope and content which drew together some 45 members and diocesan bishops and senior staff.



Many members were there for the first time, having been newly elected to the Synod. They are delegates representing the 7 archdeaconries in a diocese covering 44 countries ranging from Madeira to Moscow and Morocco to Iceland.

The location – Kardinal-Schulte Haus on the outskirts of Cologne in Germany – provides a self contained spiritual environment where worship, meals and informal fellowship form

an important part of Synod alongside the Bible Studies, discussions and decisions on issues affecting the life of churches across the diverse continent of Europe and around its borders.

These reports reflect the editor's observations and are intended to inform, educate and entertain – the same remit, incidentally, as set out in the original charter of the BBC!

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## BISHOP GEOFFREY SETS THE SCENE

Synod began with a Eucharist celebrated by the Bishop of Gibraltar in Europe who also preached about the influence of John and Charles Wesley whose lives are remembered on 24<sup>th</sup> May.



Later, as he welcomed members, especially the newly elected first time members of the Synod, he spoke of stories of growth and faith within the diocese despite challenges and difficulties. It was encouraging to see a 100% attendance.

The major topic of the week was to be the report by the Strategic Review group which had been working to create structures and staffing for a diocese equipped for our modern and fast changing world.

The Bishop also noted that next year would mark the four hundredth anniversary of the publication of the Authorised Version (King James Version) which at the time was cutting edge technology.

This also linked into the topic of communications as Synod would be looking at a Communications Review prepared, after research, by Rachel Harden, Senior Communications Officer for the Church of England, based at Church House in London. Ministry would also feature at Synod with great encouragement as our diocese has many people seeking to pursue vocations and some newly ordained people are serving their curacies in Britain bringing their European dimension which would otherwise be sadly lacking in some English dioceses.

As he reviewed the week in prospect Bishop Geoffrey looked

ahead to two major events further ahead. The expected lengthy debate at General Synod in York during July will be discussing progress on plans to consecrate women as bishops.

The Diocese in Europe would also be closely following the Pope's historic visit to Britain which will include a visit to Westminster Abbey, an event not even dreamed of twenty five or more years ago. During that visit he would be beatifying Cardinal Newman.

## WELCOME TO MADELEINE KEEPING THE GREEN TOP TRADITION

Synod welcomed Mrs Madeleine Holmes as the new Environmental Officer for the diocese. She introduced herself and joined fellow delegates in thanking her predecessor Brian Morgan for his contribution during his 30 years as a member of Synod. Madeleine said she had originally opted not to follow Brian's example of wearing a green jumper to demonstrate the message. She now saw things differently after realising that the only green jersey she could recall was worn by goalkeepers in football. She sees her role as being one of the planet's goalkeepers and encouraging others to think seriously about the environment. Madeleine's first official duties will include an environmental assembly for Europe to be held in Prague and the Lambeth Palace "Shrinking the Footprint" conference this Summer.



## COMMUNICATIONS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Synod's first business session spent 90 minutes considering a Communications Audit prepared by Rachel Harden, a Senior Communications Officer for the Archbishops' Council, based in Church House, Westminster. Rachel had been asked to look at the way we communicate with one another within the diocese and how we present our message outside it.

She reported that the Communications Officer was employed on a "one day a week" basis and that the webmaster is unpaid and hopes to relinquish the role. Practical suggestions offered by the review included:-

- Identifying news contacts in each of the 7 archdeaconries to supply information
- Encourage every local church to have a Publicity Officer
- Expanding the Communications role to include regular news updates for the churches, ministers and lay leaders at regular intervals
- Harness new technology and build on the experience of Podcasts and web-blogs and introduce video reports onto the website.
- New technology could also be used for "virtual meetings" to save time, travel and expense.
- Provide training information (e.g. what you need to know about being a churchwarden) available on the website.



The overall aim is to promote better communications awareness and to encourage a higher profile for the diocese at General Synod.

The report was welcomed and the Communications Committee and Bishop's Staff Meeting are expected to consider what action may be possible.

## HOW THEY GOT THERE . . . .



Economics and the environment influence the choice of venue for Synod with Cologne being one of the more accessible locations in the diocese. Many delegates arrived by air – despite concerns about volcanic ash and a British Airways strike – but many more discovered the comfort and ease of rail travel with the high speed network being regularly improved.

Synod members travelling the farthest were Mrs Jean Fountain-Wilson from Tenerife, Canon Simon Stephens from Moscow and Mrs Susan Boyd from Trondheim in Norway.

# ADMINISTERING THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

One of two keynote speakers was William Fittall, Secretary to the Archbishop's Council, the governing body of the Church of England, based in Church House, London. He said his Civil Service background had included the Probation Service and work on the Northern Ireland peace process – both of which may have been good background for work in the Church of England.

William has had personal contact with and experience of Anglican churches around Europe over the years but his task mainly involves UK based church administration - the House of Bishops, the General Synod and the Archbishop's Council – which he likened to a national executive committee.

He also gets involved in lobbying government and dealing with Westminster where he found his experience “on the other side of the fence” most helpful in tackling issues, such as new licensing laws affecting church halls and social events where the church proved a powerful lobby group.

In a frank and enlightening presentation he touched on the implications of the recent UK elections, the forthcoming Budget and the general state of economic and social life in Britain. He said that dealing with change, for example with amendments to the traditional Parson's Freehold, was never easy, especially when trying to “hold diversity together”. Forty years ago there was still a “default setting” binding together churches from various traditions and backgrounds but that is not so obvious now. However, the Church of England is still, and has always been an extremely resilient organisation – partly because power is so widely dispersed and our links are deep rooted in local parochial life, providing a Christian presence in every community.

He noted that the Diocese in Europe is big geographically and a substantial organisation albeit a complex one because of the challenges such a widespread area present. The diocese has also the same diversity of churchmanship, language and culture that is experienced in England. He hoped we were equally resilient to face the future with faith.

Answering questions from Synod members Mr Fittall explained how disestablishment affected churches in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. He observed that the process of devolution in national government has followed the lead of the church many years ago. Representatives from Greece and Belgium offered insights into the church/state relationship in their churches.

William also explained the process for forthcoming elections to the General Synod and the implication for voting reform in the light of the recent General Election and voting experiences in Britain.

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## OUR MAN IN BRUSSELS



Rev Dr Gary Wilton, Church of England Representative to the EU, who is also a member of the Synod spoke about his work and the growing opportunities it affords at the heart of the European Parliament in Brussels.

He referred to the Archbishop of Canterbury's five “Issues in focus” and how he had shaped his work around them, which involved work with the EU climate change project and linked into the European year for combating poverty and social exclusion.

He also helped the commemoration of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Schumann Declaration which underpinned the foundations of the European Union. It involved a seminar and a special service to mark Europe Day in Brussels.

Gary's work has also seen good progress on building relationships with Muslim colleagues where he spoke at a seminar on “Islam and Love” about his Christian understanding of family life and values.

He said it was important to raise the profile with EC officials and networking with contacts – mainly to be seen to be there “for the common good”.

Looking ahead to the coming year there are to be receptions and seminars celebrating Christian Voices in Contemporary Europe.

- *It is hoped that Gary will have a regular column in our diocesan magazine The European Anglican. A podcast featuring Gary will also appear shortly on the diocesan website.*

## THE GREAT DEBATE- STRATEGIC REVIEW OF THE DIOCESE

The greatest amount of time at Synod was spent discussing a detailed report from the Strategic Review Group which had been asked to look at ways of improving support and staffing within the diocese, especially the provision of four full time “self standing” Archdeacons instead of the present seven who also have to serve as chaplains in their own local church.



Ven Patrick Curran, the Eastern Archdeacon and also Chaplain of Christ Church Vienna spoke about the pressures and tensions of his dual role. “It can lead to confusion and lack of understanding on the part of many people in the local churches” he said. Many former archdeacons would also confirm the toll on health and wellbeing that can result from such a shared ministry.

Almost all those who spoke during the two lengthy debates praised the detailed work of the Review Committee – not least because it helped to clarify the legal status of the diocese although many speakers felt the unquantifiable cost of the plans left them uneasy about giving outright support for immediate action.

Bishop Geoffrey spoke passionately about how the Diocese in Europe had been created as in the Book of Genesis “from a situation without form and void”! Such growing pains meant there should be financial support from the Church Commissioners, among others, and he urged members to pass the motion which included enough flexibility to ask for that help.

Synod approved the report with an amendment which meant that the seven Archdeaconry Synods will get a chance to debate the scheme while it also allows time to seek finding from church or external sources to make the changes that Synod members agreed are needed for an expanding diocese.

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### THEY SAID THAT TOO!

- “18 years ago I was asked to advise on improving communications among archdeacons. I recommended they should each be provided with a fax machine. They were and the problem was solved. Times have changed!” (Mr Roger Fry during the Communications debate)
- Soon after my arrival I looked for the telephone number of a fellow bishop. I discovered the Bishop of Norwich was listed in the London telephone directory. I thought this was unexpected metropolitan recognition until I saw the word ‘reservations’ after my name. That was how I discovered that I’m actually a wine bar in Moorgate. (Bishop Graham James – of Norwich!)

- Lawyer joke from the Diocesan Registrar, Aidan Hargreaves Smith “What have you got if you have a lawyer buried up to his neck in sand?” ANSWER “Not enough sand!”

## MINISTRY MATTERS – A EUROPEAN AND BRITISH PERSPECTIVE

The second keynote speaker was the Rt Rev Graham James, Bishop of Norwich, who chairs the Church of England’s Ministry Division. In a wide ranging review of sociological trends affecting the church and ministry in Britain he challenged the diocese to think broadly and positively about its church development.

Bishop Graham observed that 1,400 ordinands are currently training for ministry in Britain (a number of these coming from the Diocese in Europe) and that is ten times the number preparing for ministry in the Roman Catholic Church. Including the many non stipendiary ministers the average age is now 45, (for full time, stipendiary ministry it is 37). But the challenge is that in Britain 40% of clergy are due to retire within the next ten years.

Financial challenges and changes in the way theological training is organised affect our understanding and planning for the future of ministry. Here are three short excerpts from Bishop Graham’s challenge to the church.



*The impact of both globalisation and the increased movements of peoples around the world has led to a much more variegated religious culture. You are part of it. Increasingly clergy, and especially the clergy of this diocese, are dealing with people who have remarkably complex religious histories. It is becoming exceptional even in England for an ordinand to have been born into an Anglican family, practice the faith of his or her baptism and never waver from the path. And because of the complexity of the religious scene these days the clergy are expected to know about religion itself. Of course understanding religion as a phenomenon in the modern world isn’t a prerequisite of preaching Christ crucified or exercising pastoral ministry or presiding at the sacraments. But it’s becoming necessary for the clergy to have greater expertise in religion itself, given both the context and the varied histories of those with whom they deal.*

*Some people imagine that if we only got back to the Book of Common Prayer there would be a renewal of faith. Others think Fresh Expressions and pioneer ministers must be the answer. Some believe we should get rid of our church buildings, while others reckon we should cherish and beautify them. Some want the church to be engaged vigorously in social welfare whereas others think that if only we gave complete priority to prayer everything else would fall into place. This phenomenon isn’t simply a big church issue. There are congregations of ten which embrace very different views and priorities. Many of them in a diocese like mine. Plenty of them I suspect, in a diocese like yours.*

*The danger we face in the Church of England and within this diocese is that we could end up with a whole range of congregations each with a narrow and singular, yet contrasting, view of the world, and without much contact with each other. This is already developing since it fits in with the temper of our times, especially in Western Europe. We could end up with a great smorgasbord of varieties of churchmanship and tradition, each existing as if none of the rest were part of the world at all. That would be a retreat from the religious complexity of the times in which we live.*

MORE OF BISHOP GRAHAM’S ADDRESS TO SYNOD WILL BE FEATURED IN THE NEXT EDITION OF THE DIOCESAN MAGAZINE “THE EUROPEAN ANGLICAN” PUBLISHED IN SEPTEMBER.

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## EVERY DAY A FESTIVAL



Many thanks to Rev John Wilkinson from Fontainebleau in France who prepared and shared in leading the many acts of worship which make the Diocese in Europe Synod different from most others.

Our worship each day also highlighted the fact that there are many saints, great and small, who have their days of commemoration.

We honoured John and Charles Wesley, The Venerable Bede and Augustine of Canterbury among others in worship which was varied in word and music.

## BIBLE STUDIES TO MAKE YOU THINK AND QUESTION

Many Christians agree that Saint Mark's Gospel is the earliest of the New Testament accounts of Christ. Many a sermon has also been preached about the basic simplicity of Mark. In three daily Bible Studies Rev Stephen Tucker, Vicar of Hampstead, revealed aspects of Mark which seem to go much deeper than is generally thought. He focussed on three part of Mark where we read and ask "What on earth is that all about?"



One of these passages is the account of the cursing of the fig tree near Jerusalem. As Stephen delved into Old Testament references to fig trees and then linked these with the location which taught us about the Temple in Christ's teaching. Did you know, for example that:-

- Groups of bandits and revolutionaries used the Temple as a hideout and refuge
- The parable of the sower refers to seed reproducing one hundred fold but that is something extremely rare – even in Bible understanding.
- Mustard trees were not popular with Galilean farmers in Jesus' time – but they were popular with birds – shedding some new light on one of Mark's images.
- The parable of the householder who needs to keep awake includes references to midnight, third hour, morning – was Mark here preparing us for the crucial hours in the timescale of Holy Week?

Members of Synod expressed their thanks to Stephen and agreed that Bible Study forms an essential mutual learning experience during the week. Stephen

himself questioned how many Christians formed their image of Jesus from hymns rather than Scripture then added that this, in turn, points to the need for more modern hymns to be based on the Bible.

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## AND FINALLY . . . .

Many tonsils took a hammering during the Synod in Cologne, in the prayers and singing in chapel, in group discussions and larger debates, at mealtimes and in snatched conversations. We hope this Synod Digest has given you a taste of what representatives were doing to strengthen and support the mission and ministry of our 270 church congregations around Europe.



- You can hear more on the 3 recorded Podcasts to be found on the diocesan website
- Look out for more, including the Ministry Team presentation in the next edition of the European Anglican
- Let us know what you think of this new publication – comments, corrections and positive suggestions are always welcome to the Communications Officer, [paul.needle@europe.c-of-e.org.uk](mailto:paul.needle@europe.c-of-e.org.uk)

