

## General Synod Report

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The Church of England continued today its obsession with sex and in particular homosexual sex. The Church leadership has contributed to this by producing the report Issues in Human Sexuality which is ambiguous and which has hung around for over a decade without being properly discussed by the Synod. Whenever questions are raised on the matter of sexuality there is now a standard answer – we need more time to reflect on it. The latest contribution to the debate will be a study guide due before Christmas. Of course the Church of Christ has had a perfectly good position paper on sexual practice, it is called the Bible. The Church has held for nearly two millennia that the sole proper place for sexual relationships is heterosexual marriage. Yet there are those who are obsessed with sex and wish to change this teaching, who will not let go until it is changed.

To the forefront today came Peter Tatchell from Outrage. Though Mr Tatchell gained lots of publicity it is clear that he has done his cause considerable harm within the Synod. During the morning debates Tatchell and six others marched into the Synod accompanied by a posse from the press. For half an hour they stood with placards on the stage which Tatchell harangued the Synod. Some Synod members took the opportunity to go for a cup of coffee whilst others stayed obstinately in place unwilling to allow such tactics to disturb the democratic processes by which the Synod operates. LGCM have a very clear agenda, they are obsessed by sex and they will go on shouting until they can get the church to approve their lifestyles. Genuine Christians, ruled not by their own desires but by the desires of God will go on saying that sexual intercourse has its sole proper place within heterosexual marriage.

The evening session was taken up with **questions** and perhaps over a third of these were focussed on the Issues report, the situation in New Westminster and the appointment of Jeffrey John. Because Dr John had rightly stepped down as future Bishop of Reading the questions were far less fractious than they might have been. (The presence of so many questions may even have contributed to the decision to secure his withdrawal.) Synod was generally content to let the questions run rather than dwell too much on some of the issues involved. However, one of the most extraordinary contributions came from the Bishop of Guildford, John Gladwin who is soon to move to Chelmsford – presumably with the intention that having liberalised one Diocese he can now work on another. Gladwin gave several answers that will repay scrutiny because they were at very best ambiguous.

At one point he when asked about the need to concentrate on the proper place of sexual relationships being within marriage he seemed to be saying that this was not the case.

Other business transacted during the day:

**Miscellaneous Provisions Measure** – a hotch potch of minor changes to legislation.

**Stipends (Cessation of Special Payments)** – this is the guaranteed annuities. Many churches had these payments from ancient times. They are anachronistic but they also remind us that the centralisation of clergy stipends is only 30 years old. For most of its history the Church had run its financial affairs very differently. In the present climate the experiment with centralisation looks like it may be running out of steam.

The **Legal Officers Fees** was a surprisingly close run thing with about 35% of the Synod present voting against it. This is unusual but reflects a concern that the present policy is leading to a hierarchy of different payment levels for Diocesan Chancellors.

In the afternoon the Synod received two presentations. The first on the review of theological training that will be debated on Monday.

The second presentation was on statistics of ethnic origin. This did throw up the fact that today 9% (1 in 11) of the population are of an official ethnic minority. In the Church of England this proportion is 3%. This is probably not a surprising statistic given that large swathes of ethnic minorities will from cultural backgrounds historically linked with other religions.

The report on **Choosing Diocesan Bishops** was also approved which changes the name of the Crown Appointments Commission to the Crown Nominations Committee. Long-term readers of EVNEWS may remember the manoeuvres that have gone on over the composition of the Committee in particular how many Diocesan representatives there should be. Today the Synod achieved a marvellous Anglican compromise, the existing members have been increased not to the eight which Synod at one stage agreed but instead to six. This will give local representatives more of a say and will hopefully stop those situations where the 'Diocesan Four' are too heavily slanted by the inclusion of Diocesan officials such as Archdeacons, Suffragan Bishops and Deans.

The final business of the afternoon was consideration of the report '**Called to Act Justly**'.

*David Phillips*  
*General Secretary, Church Society*  
*Synod representative for St. Alban's Diocese.*