

BRIEFING

Agree to Differ!

*A guide to the General
Synod elections 2005*



parish and people

ISBN 1 873529 23 6

Parish and People,
The Old Mill, Spetisbury,
Blandford Forum, Dorset DT11 9DF

£1 each



ABOUT parish and people

PARISH AND PEOPLE was founded in 1949 and was instrumental in effecting a quiet revolution in popularising the parish communion. In 1963 it merged with the Keble Conference Group to spearhead movements towards team ministry, synodical government and church unity. In 1970 it was largely responsible for the formation of the ecumenical movement 'ONE for Christian Renewal' .

PARISH AND PEOPLE has, however, continued to promote new life in the Anglican denomination, and publishes a range of stimulating material for parishes and deaneries in order to enable the growth from the grass roots up of a lively open people's church in which lay ministry can blossom.

THE DEANERY RESOURCE UNIT was launched in 1989, over 250 deaneries throughout the C of E now subscribe to this bi-annual mailing, which includes the well-established *Deanery Exchange* leaflet and 'starter', together with booklets and briefings on matters of deanery concern. Further details are given below. The Unit is working in collaboration with the Church House Deaneries Group and other bodies to bring a breath of fresh air to the 'missing link' in the C of E' s structure, and your ideas for future developments are most welcome.

D.R.U. MAILING : £12 a year single subscription (50 copies of DX); £20 double (100 copies of DX).

Starter Pack : £5 - includes Deanery Exchange and a selection of briefings and booklets.

Booklets (£2 each)

The Rise of the Deanery

Chairing the Synod

Making the Deanery Work

Leading the Deanery

Flying Deanery Kites

Deaneries, Evangelism and Unity

Devolution to the Deanery

Devolution 2, Loosing the Apron Strings

Ministry in the Deanery

A Look at Rural Deans and Deaneries

Training for Local Ministry

Pastoral Reorganisation

Communications in the Deanery

All Together Now

Consultation & Training for Rural Deans

Appointing Rural Deans

Leadership & Vision

Specials (£2 each)

Psalms of Life - John Hammersley

Psalms for the Synod - John Hammersley

Every Step of the Way (£5) - John Hammersley

Conference Reports (£2 each)

A Bridge Thus Far (1998)

Like It Or Lump It (2002)

Briefings (£1 each)

The Role of the Rural Dean

Deanery Mission Audit

Guidelines for Deanery Officers

Training for Rural/Urban Deans

Training for the Lay Chair

Setting the Agenda

The Deanery and Ecumenism

Pastoral Committees

Church House Deaneries Group

Money Matters

The Deanery Specialist

This is your Synod

Models of Ministry

Four Deanery Plans

The Parish Magazine Inset - Peter Croft

Victorian Church News - Peter Croft

Catching The New Vision (2000)

Releasing the Energy (2004)

For the full detailed list, visit www.parishandpeople.org.uk/pubs

write to Parish and People, The Old Mill, Spetisbury, Blandford Forum, DT11 9DF

phone : 01258 453939

Email : PandPeople@aol.com

AGREE TO DIFFER !

"Do not confuse Agreement with Unity, or Faith with Certainty" was a maxim coined at the Church Leaders Conference in Birmingham in 1972. It remains true today.

There was great disagreement in the Upper Room at the Last Supper as the disciples argued over who was the greatest. Jesus showed them who was the greatest by washing their feet, and gave them unity by incorporating them into his Body through bread and wine.

Three days later Thomas refused to believe in the resurrection. He wanted the certainty of his own sight and touch. A week later Jesus provided him with the certainty he needed, but then said *"Blessed are those who believe without seeing."* Today there is a tectonic fault among Christians, between those who by temperament need certainty, and those who are content with a faith simply to trust in the God of the bible who is always going ahead of his people. As the plates shift in that tectonic fault, they are shaking the Church to its foundations and inflicting many casualties among its members. The Church needs to allow space for both approaches to belief, as Jesus did that evening after Easter.

Later by the lakeside, after Jesus had grilled him, Peter asks Jesus *"What about John ?"* Jesus replies *"Never you mind about him - YOU follow me."* Each Christian has his or her own call. Church people need to beware of dictating to others what to believe or how to follow Jesus. God's people are not photocopies, so the membership of the church cannot be confined to those who toe one particular theological line.

St Paul wrote of the peace of God which passes human understanding. The shalom of God transcends human logic. Too often churchgoers seem to think they can confine God within the limitations of human thought and language. God surely cannot be restricted to any of our faith boxes, nor should membership of the Church be limited to those who fit my chosen box.

Indeed theologians have helped the Church down the ages to believe in an illogical God: both Three and One - at the same time transcendent and immanent - immortal and crucified - impassible and a suffering servant - incarnate and eternal. If in the Christian understanding of God we can hold together mutually contradictory beliefs, may Christians not find a way of walking together [synodically] while at the same time holding mutually contradictory beliefs ?

An ecumenical gathering of Christians in China between the Wars decided they would:

**Agree to Differ,
Resolve to Love,
Unite to Serve.**

May Anglicans do the same, and in that spirit address the issues that confront us, in particular those who are called to stand for election to the General Synod this year, and those who are given the opportunity and responsibility to elect those who will sit there for the next five years.

In setting out the arguments *For* and *Against* the issues on the following pages (compiled by Canon Christopher Hall) no endorsement is implied of any views expressed.

USE YOUR VOTE !

There are three Houses in General Synod - one for Bishops, one for Clergy [the 'Convocations'], and one for Lay People.

If you are ordained, and beneficed or hold a Bishop's Licence, you have a vote for the clergy to represent your diocese in Convocation.

If you have been elected to represent your parish on your Deanery Synod, you have a vote for diocesan members of the House of Laity.

If you have a vote, you will be sent a Nomination paper this August. If you believe you have a contribution to make, don't wait to be asked to stand. Talk to a former General Synod member to find out what is involved. You need two other electors to nominate you. Because voters vote for those they know, or those who know you, seek out well-known proposers in other parts of the diocese from your own. Get your nomination form signed before holidays remove your sponsors, and back to the Returning Officer before mid-September.

VOTING IS AS EASY AS ONE, TWO, THREE

When the Ballot paper arrives, read the Election Addresses. Phone the candidates you might vote for to ask where they stand on your most important issues.

Then simply number the candidates in your order of preference: 1, 2, 3 ... Go on until there is no-one left you would want on Synod.

This way your vote cannot be wasted. If your First choice is knocked out for having the least votes, your whole vote will be transferred to your next choice, or to the next of

your choices who is still in the count.

Your First choice is the most important - give it to the person you most want to see elected. Don't assume "S/he's sure to get in. I'll give someone else a chance." Many a valued old hand has been dumped that way.

If your First choice gets too many votes, your vote is still not wasted. The surplus of your vote not needed to elect that candidate is transferred to your next choice.

This is called the 'Single Transferable Vote' - the fairest system there is. The Church of England has been using it for 35 years - for once ahead of the times.

Don't forget to sign the back of the ballot paper. That's to prevent cheating. No-one will know how you voted.

The ballot papers will be issued by mid-September. Make sure you return yours to the Presiding Officer before the closing date shown on the ballot paper.

USE YOUR VOTE !

Crucial issues face the Church of England which General Synod will be debating over the next five years. Copies of '*Agree to Differ !*' can be downloaded from www.parishandpeople.org.uk.

Other relevant websites are :
www.affirmingcatholicism.org.uk
www.forwardinfaith.com
www.inclusivechurch.net
www.opensynodgroup.org.uk
www.reform.org.uk
www.watchwomen.com

5. Disestablishment

- *Should the Church / State link be broken ?*

YES :

God is the Supreme governor of the Church - not the Queen.

The Church of England should not rely on having a privileged status in society.

Britain is now a multi-faith society.

A small minority of the population actively belong to the Church of England.

It is wrong for the Prime Minister to have the final choice of Bishops.

Bishops should not automatically have seats in the House of Lords.

Parliament should not have the final say in Church legislation.

CofE clergy should be able to stand for election to parliament.

Disestablishment would give Church leaders greater freedom to be prophetic.

The Church would be healthier without relying on the endowments from Queen Anne.

The CofE can no longer afford to maintain its physical presence in every locality.

NO :

Establishment recognises the important role of religion in society.

Disestablishment would give the signal that religion no longer matters.

Establishment is welcomed by other faiths and denominations.

Bishops in the House of Lords have the opportunity to speak as the nation's conscience .

Establishment underlines the Church's responsibility to serve the whole community.

Establishment opens the doors of government to representations on moral and social issues.

Establishment gives local clergy a leadership role in the community.

ELECTION ISSUES

1. Women Bishops

- *Should women be consecrated as Bishops in the Church of England ?*

YES :

The choice of people to be bishops should be on spiritual merit not on gender.

To exclude women is to make 20% of priests ineligible and thus narrow the field.

To maintain a glass ceiling on preferment is to make women into an order of second-class priests, excluded from using their God-given gifts of leadership.

The claim that scripture excludes women from positions of authority over men has already been shown to be a hang-over from earlier centuries.

Unity with Methodists requires that women may be made Bishops : a Methodist woman has already served as President of British Methodists.

There are already women bishops in the worldwide Anglican family; reunion with Rome would be with the whole of Anglican Communion, not just those without women priests - let alone Bishops.

NO :

To ignore the Bible's prohibition of women exercising 'headship' over men is to deny the infallibility of scripture.

To ordain women as Bishops would further alienate those who believe that they cannot in any case be ordained priests.

A woman cannot be a 'Father in God', nor represent the Fatherhood of God.

Uncertainty about the orders of men who are ordained by women will invalidate the sacraments they perform.

A bishop is to be a focus of unity; a woman bishop would further divide the Church.

It will postpone still further reunion with Roman Catholics.

2. Act of Synod

- *Should the Act of Synod be repealed, which allows those with conscientious objections to women priests to opt for the pastoral care of a bishop who shares their views ?*

YES :

Bishops are a symbol of unity; therefore the Catholic understanding is that one bishop

cannot exercise authority in parallel with another - such as if a 'Third Province' were created.

Continuing to allow clergy and congregations to choose a Bishop who agrees with them is to make disunity legitimate.

The Act is being used to recruit opposition to women priests.

The Act condones discrimination by creating no-go areas for women priests.

In such no-go areas it excludes those who support women from the affirmation of their own diocesan bishop.

The Act implies that women's ordination is not universally valid. Methodists will not accept union with Anglicans if the Act is still in force. It is dishonest to pretend that people with contradictory views can remain in communion with each other.

It is illogical for two opposite doctrines to exist side by side in the same church.

NO :

The Act was agreed to provide freedom of conscience to those

who could not accept the decision to ordain women.

They had not changed; their Church had been changed.

The Act was designed to provide space for the decision to ordain women to be accepted, rather than to drive out those who were, and still are, unhappy.

The Church is a family which welcomes those of differing opinions.

It is too soon to expect the opponents of the decision to accept what has happened.

It would be to break promises made at the time the decision was taken to ordain women.

3. Human Sexuality

- *How inclusive should the Church be with regard to people of different sexual orientations ?*

EXCLUSIVE :

The Church must uphold the standard that sexual practice is confined to heterosexual marriage.

Accepting homosexuals would be a further step down the slippery slope of falling standards.

Family life must be upheld for the sake of a stable society.

To bless a homosexual partnership as equivalent to a 'marriage' is to devalue marriage.

Higher standards are to be expected of the clergy than of lay members of the church.

Scripture clearly outlaws homosexual practice.

Homosexual practice is unnatural and abhorrent.

The consecration of a homosexual bishop is dividing the Anglican Communion.

INCLUSIVE :

God accepts all people as they are. That is the message of the Gospel. Jesus healed the centurion's 'boy' [a word commonly used for a male partner].

The Church does not exclude anyone by virtue of who they are, or how they are made. ("Many feel that they are condemned not for their behaviour but for their nature." ✠ Rowan Cantuar)

Christian history is a record of being led by the Spirit into ever-widening inclusiveness, overturning taboos, even those of scripture.

The Church has been obsessed with sexual matters, while accepting as full members those who freely break biblical commandments in other spheres.

Many valued priests and lay people are being driven from the Church because of their sexual orientation.

Homosexual partners often exhibit the same life-long selfless commitment as do heterosexual partners.

4. Money Matters

- *Can the CoFE maintain its overall parochial presence?*

If all Church of England members were gladly to give even one twentieth of their net take-home pay, the Church would have enough funds to pay for what it is called to do at home and abroad.

Without the subsidy of past generosity, members of other churches have long expected to give a tenth of their income, so as to cover the full costs of paying, housing and pensioning their ministers and of their place of worship.

Even though the number of vocations to ordained ministry has increased greatly, there will still not be enough new clergy to replace those who are due to retire.

Although small rural and down-town parishes need their church building as centres of community, they

Partners should be free to choose whatever lifestyle they wish as long as it respects each other's humanity.

There should not be double standards in what is permitted for lay and ordained Christians.

The strongest critics of homosexuals are often those who are uncertain of their own sexuality.

Those who know a close friend or family member who is homosexual are the least prone to condemning them.

cannot be expected to pay the full cost of maintaining them. The richer churches need to be willing to go without some of their own facilities to support them, while not expecting to control their policies or teaching.

The government should recognise the value of the church to the nation and the local community, and greatly reduce the burden of VAT on repairs. Other European countries do much more to maintain their church buildings.

The work of the Church is wider than an individual parish. The priorities of a Church, which is both national and international, cannot be determined solely by what is in the interests, or for the benefit, of a local congregation.

Christians need to beware of using the power of their money to get their own way in policy decisions, by choosing what or what not to support.