

## Deanery Synod report #1

As it's the first time I've done this, let me tell you a little about what GS is like:

- It's like a Christian version of Parliament; there are 3 sessions a year – 2 in London (Nov/Feb) and one at York University (July). There's about 500 people elected.
- It's very strange – it takes at least two sessions before you get any idea what is going on and how to 'work the system'
- There's a lot of legal process to adhere to; a lot of points of order; an awful lot of speaking (and listening) – mentally it is very tiring
- There is an awful lot of reading to do before you even arrive – literally hundreds of pages (I kid you not)
- You need to read all this stuff so you can (a) ask questions in advance and (b) so you can ask to speak in certain debates
- There are no tea breaks – you start at 9am and finish at 7pm with only time off for lunch – unless you give in and go to the café (which you have to do at some point); even then you can see the debate on the big screen there
- Even at lunchtime you don't get a break as there are fringe meetings to go to, so ... you arrive at your fringe meeting, grab your sandwiches and fruit, listen to the speakers, ask questions ... then rush back to the Synod for the afternoon session
- Then after it finishes at 7pm you have more fringe meetings to go to – sometimes with food provided – then you meet up with your friends (if they are not too exhausted) for a bite to eat and a drink ... then bed!
- Note: During February GS I went to fringe sessions on climate change, disability, Palestine, new research on how unsafe LGBT people feel in church and conversion therapy – and I wasn't even invited to Lambeth Palace one evening as my Diocese didn't begin with B or C! It only lasts 3 days! It is exhausting.
- If you want the detail, subscribe to The Church Times – it does a good summary of each session.
- If anyone is interested, I do a Synod Diary for my local church rag after each session – purely personal, often humorous, very dodgy – where I pick out the things that interested me and tell stories about what I got up to when I wasn't sitting in the chamber.

So what happened in the February session? This is what struck me:

- There was a powerful session on **racial justice**. The Racial Justice commission was set up by the ABC based on the latest report on racism in the church – it will last for 3 years. Lord Paul Boateng is the president. He is a gifted communicator – he makes you laugh, then he sticks the knife in. Just one soundbite: "There's more racial diversity on the government front bench than there is in here!" He promised to keep 'our feet to the fire.' The problem is that the CofE produces loads of reports on this topic – but does nothing about the recommendations. The main idea was to appoint a Racial Justice Officer in each Diocese. The response? We haven't got the money. The RJ Commission will work to help change the culture so that we get more senior representation – at places like the GS and elsewhere – for ME/GMH people. One question at GS asked how many ME/GMH people there in the church – we didn't even know.
- Changing the **structure of the CofE**. People don't like change. We spent half an hour debating whether we should 'accept' or 'welcome' the report (I kid you not). The aim is to simplify all the major church bodies to avoid overlap and duplication – and reduce cost. A

good thing. You'd think we were debating whether a witch should be the next ABC, given all the energy that was spent on it. There was a real lack of trust, which just saddened me.

- We had a big debate about the **environment and climate change**. Essentially, it boiled down to ... boilers! And how we can avoid replacing them with oil-fired ones. If we don't, we then push out our net zero goal for another 25 years (effectively).
- There was a good discussion on **persecuted Christians**. The Bishop of Truro has produced an excellent report for the UK government on this topic – which is being implemented. 430 million Christians are persecuted right now.
- Finally, there was a powerful debate on **human trafficking** – especially the impact on children. I'm running out of time so just read the Clewer initiative.
- The ABC always gives a speech at the start. This time he talked about 'disagreeing well' – a regular topic. We should become God's abundance to others, vehicles of grace, kind and forgiving, walking together – no one loses, no one gets left behind. The CofE has 2 courses that promote this: 'The Difference' (a reconciliation course) and the 'Pastoral Principles'. We had a session on both after his talk. Check them out.

I hope that's useful. If you want to know more, just get in touch. I'm a real believer in spreading the news as to what happens at GS. I think everyone should know – right down to each local church.